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**WILLIAM BLACKWOOD & SONS,
EDINBURGH AND LONDON.**

The Mercenary

A Tale of
The Thirty Years' War

BY

W. J. ECCOTT

AUTHOR OF 'HIS INDOLENCE OF ARRAS,'
'THE RED NEIGHBOUR,' ETC.

William Blackwood and Sons
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THE MERCENARY:

A TALE OF THE THIRTY YEARS' WAR.



CHAPTER I.

IN SEARCH OF BOOTY.

IT was the evening of the second day of the sack of Magdeburg. Nigel Charteris, soldier of fortune by profession and in rank captain of musketeers, sought a certain house in the Kloster Strasse, if haply it were still standing.

It troubled the captain little that Magdeburg should be sacked. He was of the Catholic faith. And Magdeburg had proved herself malignantly Protestant. She had flouted the Edict of Restitution. The Emperor Ferdinand II., Habsburger by race, Catholic to the marrow, had proclaimed that the possessions, wrenched from the grasp of the Catholics a hundred years before by the Lutherans and Calvinists, should be restored to Catholic hands, that the mass bell should tinkle in every chancel, and all be as if that pestilent monk, that Junker Georg of the Wartburg, had never been. Rome had bided her time, as Rome can always bide her time, and seize her

opportunity. The Emperor found himself with a right good flail and a stout husbandman, Count Tilly, to wield it. The husbandman with his flail had arrived before the threshing-floors of Magdeburg in bleak March. It had taken him to jocund May to force an entrance, and then the threshing and the winnowing began.

It was a question if the house in the Kloster Strasse still stood, for even before the turbulent entry of the Emperor's troops fires had broken out, and still burned furiously. It was a city of shards and carcasses. Here and there streets still stood, as a patch of corn stands, left for to-morrow's cutting, amid the prone swathes. Nigel wondered if he would be able to recognise the street that he had left as the dawn broke that morning.

"This is the street, Captain. The spire's had a shake!" said Sergeant Blick.

Nigel nodded, and strode over the stones, and the sheet-lead, and the broken images of stone and of human flesh that lay in his path. But for the loss of its church-tower the street was still passably whole. Clambering over the barrier of ruins, a half company of musketeers followed in loose order, expectant of more plunder. All day they had spent in camp, and were now let out for their share in the ruthless harvesting. There was method too in their captain's gleaning.

He halted his men, and addressed Sergeant Blick in the tone of a man used to command and accustomed to be obeyed.

"Now, Sergeant, you and two men come with me. The rest may help themselves in this street. It is now seven o'clock. At nine they will fall in, and march back to camp. No throat-cutting! No drunkenness! And no mishandling of women!"

Sergeant Blick wheeled about, marched three paces to

the front, and repeated the orders in a fine sonorous voice. By way of making them more intelligible, he called his men "drunken pigs" and "little calves" and "blunder-heads," and added a few very personal admonitions to the more wilfully or weakly inclined of the flock. Then he wheeled about again, his two picked men followed, and Nigel, in front of the three, marched up the street till he came to a tall house which stood with projecting upper storeys and an almost magisterial aspect amid its smaller fellows.

The massive door yielded to a push, admitting them to a stone-paved hall, on either side of which there were some very meagrely furnished rooms, and behind it kitchens, larders, and servants' quarters equally bare. Nothing of portable or eatable was to be seen. Nor was there a single kitchen wench.

Having made this reconnaissance, Nigel mounted the wide open staircase with Sergeant Blick at his heels, and the two musketeers, two steps behind, to preserve the distance prescribed by the sergeant's rank.

They halted at the first landing. From behind the first door came the stifled cry of a woman, and a dull sound of a fall. Sergeant Blick essayed to open it in vain.

Nigel Charteris rapped upon it with the hilt of his sword.

"Open in the name of the Emperor!" he demanded.

A key turned in the lock.

"I warn you!" said a haughty voice, the voice of a woman of rank, rich and full. "You enter at your own peril!"

For answer Nigel thrust his foot and his steel cap into the opening as the door gave way a span, and a dagger descended with the breathless fury of a woman's onset, only to glance off the casque, while the assailed swung

round and seized the wrist of the thruster. The dagger fell to the floor. Blick stooped and picked it up and thrust it into his belt, where it had company of the same sort. It was worth a guilder, he reflected; and stood waiting just inside the door, his men without.

The soldier of fortune was a tall man, and she who faced him, flushed and disappointed, was a tall woman. The soldier of fortune was a handsome fellow of a dark russet upon olive complexion, with a crisp curl to his moustaches and his hair, though little of that emerged from the steel cap inlaid with gold that had so well protected him. Her eyes ran over him and said to her "Lineage." His eyes in turn told him that the woman was sprung of a ruling race, incapable of fear, unused to any domination: told him also that she had dark hair in abundance, dark mist-laden eyes, a clear paleness of complexion which was neither white nor yellow nor pink nor olive; told him that her carriage was that of a queen, and that she was as virginal as the dawn.

If the eagle in her held his eyes in its imperious clutch, hers encountered a spirit just as much an eagle's. High lineage and high poverty had been his portion, and no Charteris had ever feared to look a haughty beauty in the eyes.

It was the matter of an instant. Nigel looked round.

In the embrasure of the principal window, seated in a great chair, was the figure of an old man, whose dress denoted a Lutheran pastor. His head was fallen helplessly sidelong on the pillows that had but a few moments ago supported it. He was dead. At his feet, half on the dais of the window, lay a golden-haired girl. The great white kerchief that covered her shoulders and bosom showed a red spot over the heart, and a little dagger was still enclosed by the listless fingers that lay quiet in her lap. She too looked like one that is dead.

"Your handiwork, brave captain!" said the dark lady bitterly. "Pastor Reinheit died of shock as you halted without. Elspeth stabbed herself to save her honour as soon as she heard your footsteps on the stair. It was well done!"

"Count Tilly does not make war upon girls!" said Nigel angrily, striding across and kneeling beside the girl. "Bring water, linen, and salve!" Gently he laid her flat upon the floor with a cushion beneath her head. Quickly he unfastened the neckerchief and staunched the blood till he could see the wound, of what width it was, and how the blood welled up into its mouth. Then he looked at the dagger.

"Blick! Look you here! A flesh wound! A thumb-nail's depth? What say you?"

Sergeant Blick gently pinched the wound.

"Aye, is it! More fright than hurt! A barber's stitch of a silk thread. A bandage and salve! 'Tis all she needs."

Nigel looked up. The lady of the misty eyes looked down.

"She lives!" said he. "You have but to wash the wound, put in three stitches, lay salve upon it and a bandage of linen. She will not bleed to death this time."

The woman knelt down and did as she was bidden with deft long fingers and without a word.

Before the bandage was made secure the girl Elspeth opened her eyes and her gaze fell first upon Nigel. A red flush came to her cheek, perhaps because of her neck lying so uncovered before a man, perhaps by reason of other thoughts. And as the colour natural to her face, a healthy rosy hue, came back, Nigel on his part gave a little start of surprise and turned away. He wondered that he had not known her again. Yesterday she had worn a healthy ruddiness in her cheeks and a white dress

upon her jolly plump form. To-day with the absolute pallor of her swoon and her sombre grey clothes his eyes had been cheated, or was it that his eyes had lost something of their natural sharpness in the duello with those others of the race of eagles?

The service rendered to her golden-haired friend, the snowy neck once more shrouded in its covering kerchief, the dark lady resumed her haughty aloofness. A flash had broken through the mists of her eyes, as a passing gleam of the moon breaks for an instant through fast scudding clouds, when she saw the recognition pass. Perhaps she wondered. Elspeth was of the burgher-class, well-to-do it might be, and she who looked was noble by every outward token, and might well disregard such affairs as brought a poor gentleman of the sword, and an outlander to boot, into contact with a burgher-maiden at the sack of Magdeburg.

Nigel Charteris was indifferent. He concerned himself as little with the thoughts of either girl. His present business was the gathering of booty. No man became soldier or officer in Tilly's army for his pay. Pay was a mighty uncertain thing. So was the sack of a town. So many were the avenues to perdition, or to salvation, according to one's views of the future state, and of one's own destination in it. A shot from a window, a tile from a roof, a stab in a dark corner, any of the three might "his quietus make." It was only common justice in the soldier's rough code that, when Dame Fortune came his way and opened a town's gates to him, he should fill his pockets, and any odd sack he could bear with him on his march. How should he pay Peter for the ultimate repose of his soul if not by relieving Paul of those riches that were an actual impediment to Paul's salvation?

Nigel took a brief survey of the room, and his eyes rested upon the motionless figure of the dead pastor,

unreal-looking in posture and in face. He frowned and crossed himself.

The proud lady followed his glance.

"A brave piece of work your Edict of Restitution! Is it not time to get on with your trade?" she taunted.

"In good time!" he said curtly. "Call in two men!" was his order to Sergeant Blick.

The two men came in, muskets at the ready.

"This lady will show you where to lay the old man!" he said.

As before she obeyed, stepping across the room to a door which opened into a small bedchamber. The two men-at-arms at a sign from the sergeant lifted the body and laid it on the bed. Elspeth of the golden-hair made an effort to rise, bent on following, but her strength had not yet returned. She lay back again on her cushion and wept silently.

"Peace! Lie still, dear heart!" said the dark lady, kneeling beside her and holding her hand, raising about her the bulwark of her own compassion, as who should say to Nigel Charteris that he was without the pale.

When the door of the dead man's chamber closed and the musketeers stood once more to command he bade them make ready their weapons. Without a look at the women he strode across the chamber to another door at the opposite side of the room to that which he had entered and flung it open.

In the doorway stood three very determined-looking men armed with pikes, and behind them a motley assembly of burghers, some armed, some not.

A curiously interested expression came upon the face of her who knelt. To her mind Tilly's captain was in the toils.

But Tilly's captain had quick ears. He had divined something of what lay behind the door. When he stepped

backward three paces and drew his sword, there stood covering the door with their muskets his two men.

The three men looked at one another. It was certain death for two out of the three. Which two? Would the others, their comrades, face it out and cut down the hated Catholics? There was a certain disadvantage in knowing their fellows. They were not sure of them. They were quite sure about the musketeers and Tilly's captain. Nigel Charteris had led a round dozen of storming parties.

"Come you!" said he with the short stern note of command.

The man indicated came sullenly forward, laid his weapon in a corner and stood upright against the wall. One by one the rest did the same as he did.

One of them was a young pastor whose thick, coarse, straw-coloured hair, heavy brow and lower jaw, companioned by two cold blue eyes, proclaimed physical energy and dour obstinacy to be his, whatever theology he carried in his wallet.

"My Bible is my weapon," he said, looking his captor in the face. "Woe unto you who wound maidens and spoil the houses of the true faith! Woe to the Edict of Restitution, edict of robbery and murder in the name of which you come! Woe to the Emperor, rightly named of Rome, for from Rome he has his orders, and from Rome his monstrous superstitions!"

His intention was to kneel beside Elspeth, but Nigel pointed to the wall.

It was a medley of weapons; an old halbert or two, some ancient bows, swords of divers patterns, daggers not a few, pikes and hunting knives, two heavy smith's hammers, and half a dozen pistols and firelocks of ponderous make and uncertain utility. These made up the tale of them.

It was a medley of men who surrendered them. Some of their belts and other accoutrements proclaimed them the organised defenders of the city, other than the Swedish soldiery that Gustavus had thrown into the place together with his devoted officer Falkenburg. The rest were merchants, artificers, apprentices, of whom some had doubtless assisted in the defence of the city, and others probably had continued to ply their callings with what peace they could.

Why they had mustered in this house round their old pastor, and with what hope remained, Nigel could only guess. In fact he cared nothing to know. It was but a nest of hornets to destroy.

Sergeant Blick whistled from the window. Two more men appeared to guard the door. Then he went off to gather the rest of his half company.

CHAPTER II.

NIGEL COLLECTS HIS DUES.

NIGEL'S quick eye roved over the throng.

"Now, Master Scrivener!" he said, picking out a lean-faced worthy who shrank behind a burly citizen. "Sit you at this table and write down the names and conditions of the prisoners!"

The scrivener drew forth pen and inkhorn.

"Now, madame! Yours!"

"Otilie of Thüringen!" She had risen to make the reply, and again their eyes met in silent combat.

"It would be as well, your Highness, if you carried your friend to another room! What is her name and condition?"

"Elspeth Reinheit, daughter of Andreas Reinheit, farmer, of Eisenach in Thüringen!"

Then she motioned to the young pastor, who came forward with an air of defiance which sat ill upon him, and together they lifted the girl. At the mention of her name she had opened her still tear-laden eyes and let them seek those of Nigel, who appeared not to see; but the young pastor, as he and the dark lady lifted their charge, knitted his brows as if a spasm of jealousy had waylaid him, who had some right to the feeling where the sick girl was concerned. They passed out by the

door of the room which had harboured the Magdeburgers.

"Now, sirs, step hither to the scrivener one by one; let him write your name and calling. And whatever of money or money's worth you carry on your persons place it here on the table."

There was a low murmuring, but no open dispute of his will.

A grim smile relaxed the features of the musketeers.

A grave portly merchant came forward and announced himself as "Ulrich Pfeifer, silk mercer," and deposited a gold chain and a purse of money. The eyes of the soldiers glistened as they heard the clink of the good metal. If they had thought their captain was, though a hearty fighter, a somewhat indifferent gatherer of the spoils, they were ready to retract their opinion. As for Nigel's face, it showed no eagerness or greed.

The merchant of silk was followed by a tanner, a hosier, an armourer, a shoemaker, and a maker of gloves. There were a few gold chains in the company, and the money was in purses of divers kinds and conditions, and of all the currencies of Europe. After the merchants came the craftsmen and artisans, who made but meagre contributions: and not a few lips trembled as the hard-earned and hardly-kept florins rattled on the table. Then came the apprentices, shamefaced, turning out their pockets in proof that they had none but a few copper coins, which Nigel Charteris bade them pick up again.

The scrivener's task being completed, together with the heaping of the spoil, Nigel called for Sergeant Blick and bade him conduct the prisoners to the camp and set a guard over them, till he should come to take Count Tilly's instructions for their disposal. At which order they one and all looked more crestfallen than before, for it portended they knew not what. Two months' leaguer

with all its hardships, its alarms, its hunger; a week's storming with its perils from without, two days of horrors within, had left them all with a lively sense of the power of the Emperor to enforce his edicts. And in their ears the name of Count Tilly was a synonym for an incarnation of the powers and practices of the Evil One.

But there was no appeal from the Catholic captain. The young pastor, who had returned, and the scrivener headed the procession. The soldiers below received them. Sergeant Blick gave the orders, and the noise of their retreating feet came through the open window to the ears of Nigel.

"Now," said he to the two men-at-arms, who had been with him from the beginning of the episode, "you can search the house for yourselves. Touch nothing of that which belongs to the ladies who were here; nor load yourselves with that which is heavy to carry and of no certain worth. Say to the Lady Ottilie of Thüringen that I crave her presence here in a quarter of an hour. The other two of you remain on guard without."

The order obeyed, he poured out his booty into a heap, picked out the gold pieces and the chain, that had been so cherished an adornment of the silk weaver, and put them in a purse of leather, which he fastened securely and disposed with equal care about him; then the silver pieces, which were far more numerous and bulky, he divided into four parts, two for Sergeant Blick, and one each for the musketeers, in case their ransacking of the house under the conditions laid down should provide them with but a meagre reward. These three weighty and bulky parcels, tied in separate purses, he fastened beneath his cloak to his sword-belt, and he had scarcely done so before the haughty Ottilie made her entry. Her bearing was serene and high.

He rose from the chair and bade her be seated. She

accepted the offer without thanks but without any show of disdain. She seemed to have allowed herself to enter upon a softer mood.

"I have asked for an audience, your Highness——"

"Why Highness?" she asked. "In German lands that is for princesses."

"It accords with your bearing! The grades of rank in these countries are bewildering. What would you be called?"

"In Thüringen I am styled plainly, madame!"

"Madame, be it then! Are you the daughter of the Landgrave of Thüringen?"

"In what way does that concern one of Tilly's captains of musketeers? I go where I choose, and own no man for my master."

Nigel smiled at her petulance.

"It concerns me in this way. Magdeburg is a heap of ruins. It is true a few streets remain, but I have no mind to leave you and your friend Elspeth Reinheit to be the chance prey of fire, or of plunder-seeking cut-throats."

"You describe your soldiery with admirable precision!" she interrupted.

"I was referring to the human vermin that swarm from their haunts in cities whenever order gives way to disorder, and to camp-followers who are like unto them." His voice took on a deeper seriousness. "Come to the window, it is beginning to get dusk, you will see them."

She rose and moved across in her stately way to the casement. He pointed to the street.

"Do you see those?"

Three nondescript tattered ruffians and a woman with half-naked breasts, clad in remnants, gave vent to raucous laughter, and each man fingered a long knife at his girdle.

On the back of each was a stuffed wallet, and at the sight of the lady they raised a shrill cry of glee, and made across. The lady shuddered.

"I have men outside," he said. "But if they were not, do you think your puny dagger-play, or your proud tongue, would save you? They would hack off your slender fingers for their rings, strip you for your fine linen, and if they left you your life . . ."

The girl's face blanched.

"You need not go on! I understand. What are we to do?"

"Your friend Elspeth Reinheit dwells at Eisenach? And you, madame, at some castle near by? Is it not so?"

"I have friends at the castle of the Wartburg!" she said.

"Good! I will arrange an escort and send you both to your friends. It is about three days' journey."

"Elspeth will not be able to ride!"

"Then she must have a coach, if one can be found."

"And the pastor?"

"I cannot answer for him. There are too many of them as it is."

"As to that," she said, "it depends on one's faith. But there is talk of a betrothal between them." The girl watched his face with a close scrutiny as she said it.

"I do not know what Count Tilly may order concerning him. She is quite welcome to her pastor," he said with indifference. "As I said, there are far too many pastors, and priests too for that matter, for quiet living. If they would baptise the children, marry the youths and maidens, administer the sacraments, and amuse you women in between without interfering with the other business of the world, it would be far better."

"We had better make ready!" she said. "And the dead pastor?"

"He must be left to his flock. Count Tilly will dismiss the poorest prisoners. Do you, madame, get your charge ready at once for her journey to the camp. The men shall make a litter!"

"You are more an officer of Wallenstein than of Tilly!" she said. "Were I you, I should seek employment with the former."

"Wallenstein! I was with Wallenstein till the Emperor accepted his resignation!"

"The Emperor will recall him!" she said confidently.

Nigel sprang towards her eagerly.

"Is this true? And if true, how do you know it? Who are you?"

She smiled a lofty, condescending, tantalising smile and left him.

Wallenstein! Wallenstein in chief command again! Wallenstein the supreme general of generals, the man who could pick men, place them in the exact rank they could fill, caring nothing for archdukes or landgraves, only for soldiers,—the man who could make war itself an orderly thing, not quartering rough soldiers promiscuously upon quiet burgher families, but levying contributions and spending them in pay and provisions like any merchant, getting good value for them. Wallenstein appealed to the Scot in Nigel as a thorough man, no less brave than Tilly, but a genius for organising armies, a good Catholic, but no fanatic. It was like a shrill summons to Nigel to hear that Wallenstein might take the field again. But how could this proud damsel of Thuringen know? Who was she?

To be the daughter of the Landgrave of Thuringen was to be almost the daughter of a prince. She had not admitted it, but that she came of very noble birth he

was sure. She must be steeped in Lutheranism to be in Magdeburg during the siege. Yet she seemed not to regard either the dead pastor or the living with the respect that one who was strong in the faith would be likely to show.

His men-at-arms came in, doublets and pockets stuffed. They had found no wine at all events.

He bade them take two of the old pikes from the pile of arms, tear down a curtain, and with them make a rough litter.

"I must take one more look at my uncle," Elspeth murmured when her companion returned with her, and Nigel opened the door. She paid her last dues of affection, loth to leave her dead to a possibly unceremonious burial at strange hands. But Otilie had explained the matter to her. Then she came out and lay down upon the litter.

The two musketeers lifted her as if she had weighed but a few pounds, and tramped towards the door.

Her friend walked just beside her. Nigel cast one look round and followed.

Then they made their way to the outskirts of the town beyond the ramparts and the fosses.

When Nigel had with infinite trouble found them privacy and housing for the night, the lady of Thüringen responded graciously enough to his "good night!" adding, "I am glad my dagger failed me, Sir Captain. You are too courteous to die by a woman's hand."

CHAPTER III.

TILLY, COUNT OF TZERCLAËS.

"So, sir, you would leave me for Wallenstein!" said the dry, wiry old man with the short grey beard resting on a charger of ruff, looking keenly out of a pair of very sharp eyes, which were the eyes of General Tilly, Count of Tzerclaës. "What in thunder made you think Wallenstein was in favour again?"

"It is true then, General?"

"It may prove true in time. It depends on Gustavus, on Magdeburg, on Saxony. Are you by chance a necromancer? Your calf country has produced a brood of them at times. And your King Jamie, who was father-in-law to our famous Winter King by the way, made rather a name for himself rooting out the witches, didn't he?"

Nigel Charteris knew Count Tilly's predilection for a gird at foreign officers. But as the old general was in a good vein he made no attempt to defend the memory of King Jamie, who was dead, and had died a Protestant, to Nigel in itself a proof of something lacking in his intelligence.

"Not I, General! I had it from a haughty damsel I found in the same house with the nest of Magdeburgers I brought you."

"Who was she, captain?"

"She gave herself out to be the Lady Ottilie of Thüringen! She is of a surety highly-born. But I didn't know what to make of her. She is not given to much speech, and what there is is tart in flavour. Would she by chance be a daughter of the Landgrave? She hinted at the Wartburg."

"Not she! The Landgrave has no daughter. I should like to see this damsel. She may tell an old man more than she would tell a young one like yourself. Send for her!"

Nigel gave an order to a soldier.

"As for Wallenstein, it may well be later on. At present it behoves me to let the Emperor know fully about Magdeburg, what men we have lost and what dispositions I am making, for, look you, this matter must needs rouse Gustavus and bring him about my ears. I can well spare you for a matter of ten days to ride to Vienna to bring me word again. What say you? Will you be the messenger?"

"With the greatest goodwill, General!" There was no mistaking the sentiments of the younger man. He was a soldier, and knew that this way leads to advancement.

"It should serve your turn. I know a soldier when I see one, and you have quitted yourself manfully."

"Thanks, General!" Nigel glowed all over with his commendation.

At this moment the unknown lady made her entrance. Count Tilly signed to Nigel to stay: raising his fine eyebrows with a movement that gave him a quizzical air, and a slightly amused look crept into his face. He rose and bowed politely—

"The Lady Ottilie of Thüringen?"

A look flashed from her eyes to Count Tilly's as she bowed in return.

"It is the name by which I am known to your officer here!"

"There is a singular likeness between your face and that of a lady I once met at the court of Vienna," said Count Tilly, as if it were a matter of no moment.

"Indeed!" she said unmovedly. "At the present moment I am seeking a safe-conduct to Thüringen, for myself and two persons in whom I am interested."

"To what part?"

"To Eisenach, or, if not, then to any point on the frontiers!"

"And your business, madame?"

"To restore my friends to their families, and rest, after the horrors to which you have subjected us, Count."

Tilly made no sign of displeasure. The air of amused courtesy still sat in his eyes, in his manner.

"How long have you been in Magdeburg?" he asked.

"Ten days, reckoned by time," she said with meaning.

"You must have changed into a cat, or an owl, to get into the city ten days ago!" he said, surveying her calmly.

"Yes. It was possible to *you*. Now, are you ready to start at once?"

"Within an hour, Count!"

"Good! Captain Charteris here will escort you and your party as far as Erfurt. After that you must make your own plans!"

The Lady Ottilie von Thüringen did not look overjoyed at the news. She stole a glance at the captain, who on his side evinced no rejoicing, and then at the general. One might have supposed that she suspected some design on the part of the elder man.

"It is the utmost I can hope for, I suppose," she said grudgingly.

"Women should stay at home!" said the Count.

"Especially girls of your age and condition," he added, waving his hand in token of dismissal.

The lady's lips curled as she bowed and withdrew. It was plain she was accustomed to having her own way, and not accustomed to being rebuked by generals, however eminent.

"My young friend," the Count went on to Nigel, "you will have a curious convoy as far as Erfurt. When you leave them at Erfurt, see that some trustworthy men are to accompany them. I seldom forget faces, and more rarely voices. Be careful. Look closely after her. Find out what you can! Don't make love to her! It is of no importance to you what I think. I may be misled by a resemblance. It is a thousand chances that I am. But for you, the less you know at the outset the better for you. It is a great protection sometimes not to know anything. Here is an order for a lieutenant and twenty troopers. Take any travelling carriage and four horses you can lay hands on. And stay, here are a hundred gold crowns for your expenses. On leaving Erfurt you will go as fast as possible to Vienna, after which, God be with you till we meet again!"

Nigel pocketed the crowns and the blessing with a good grace, thanked Count Tilly, and saluted. It was not often that an officer found such favour with the dry old general.

He was too busy during the next hour with his preparations to trouble his head with the speculations of Count Tilly as to the identity of "dark Otilie," as he called her to himself. In point of fact he was rather disappointed to be called upon to act as escort even as far as Erfurt. He would so much more willingly have ridden by the shortest road to Vienna, where his ambition was already, if we may speak of a man's desire outstripping his body by three days or so.

For his secret heart sang "Wallenstein," and not "Ottilie" dark or fair. Yet Wallenstein, for the little that Nigel Charteris had seen of him, or knew of him through others, was not a man to be beloved of men. He had been twice married, which might prove that he was beloved of women, or not, according to the side the pleader took. Nigel could recall without difficulty the long narrow face with the large ears set close back against the head, the high deeply-furrowed brow, the thoughtful scrutinising eyes from which all laughter was absent, the plain linen collar turned flatly down over his cuirass, the little tuft on his chin, the look of solid power about the face as a whole, a face dominated by resolution rather than pride.

What was it then that drew Nigel Charteris to him? It was perhaps the sense of the orderliness and discipline that prevailed about the famous general and emanated from him. It was perhaps the audacity that had led him to offer, in the dark days of the empire, to raise an army of twenty thousand men which should cost the Emperor nothing but his mandate, or the sound foresight that in fact provided thirty thousand for the war of '26. Nigel Charteris had marched with him as a mere subaltern to the crushing defeat of Mansfeld at Dessau on the Elbe, had joined in the resistless pursuit through Silesia, through Mähren into Hungary, where Mansfeld was striving to unite with Bethlem Gabor of Siebenburgen, most turbulent of Electors. Nigel had seen the army of thirty thousand grow into seventy thousand, and the Emperor able to dictate in the affairs of Europe. There had been nothing to equal Wallenstein's army in the world.

And then the Habsburger, listening to jealousies, to his own fears perhaps, to the Jesuits certainly, to Maximilian of Bavaria, had bidden Wallenstein, laden as he was with

honours and riches, lay down his baton. Wallenstein had made no demur, raised no standard of rebellion, had gone into retirement. The army mouldered away regiment by regiment. Some had joined Tilly, like Nigel. More had become idlers in the great cities. It had been Wallenstein's army. Without him to command even the Emperor could not keep the snows from melting.

And now came this mysterious message that Wallenstein would be summoned again. His old officers would be flocking back. Nigel felt it in his bones. Loyalty to a great leader is one of the strongest engines in the world, least visible to the eye, most potent in effect.

A travelling carriage was found, the body hung by leathern straps, steadied by light chains, to the solid box and hinder seats, which were just above the axles. From somewhere had sprung two serving maids, the one a plump, wide-chested, short Saxon girl, evidently a retainer of Elspeth Reinheit; the other, an older, slightly-wizened woman of dark complexion, with a certain air about her of one accustomed to the chambers of great ladies, of one above the common herd of waiting women, and as plainly the attendant of Otilie of Thüringen. The two had probably been hidden in some garret of the house in Magdeburg, and followed their mistresses, having no other goal to make for, to the outskirts of the camp. The Saxon girl was already on terms of familiarity with the troopers. The other held herself pursed up and aloof.

Nigel mounted the two on the hinder seat of the coach, their mistresses within, and presently gave the order to the lieutenant, who sent on two men in advance. Nigel and the lieutenant followed at the head of ten troopers. The other eight rode behind as a rearguard.

They gave a glance back at the smoking ruins of Magdeburg, out of which still rose some spires of churches which had successfully defied the conflagration, and were

no longer the objective of Tilly's cannon, and rode along the level road towards Strassfurt, comparing their military experiences of the last three days.

The young pastor had been mounted on a horse of indifferent mettle, and rode as well as he was able behind the coach just in front of the rearguard. It was clear that he was not in a grateful frame of mind, notwithstanding his freedom. Nor had he any great reason to be, for was not the fall of this great city of Magdeburg, this stronghold of Protestantism, an open and visible sign of the hated Edict?

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE ROAD TO ERFURT.

LET your journeying be never so brief, it need not be tedious. The road was as flat from Magdeburg to Strassfurt, and that was twenty miles, as is the great plain that stretches from the Zuider Zee to Warsaw and on and on. There were undulations. It was not as flat as a backgammon board, nor had it a hill that would have made an old horse out of breath.

It was a sunshiny morning towards the end of May, and the sun rises early over the German lands in May, and shines hotly towards noon on the great plain. There was little or no shelter, but horses and men, even the pastor, though he came from the pine forests of Thüringen, thought little of the heat and the dust. To the men it was a holiday jaunt after the military turmoils of the past two months. To the pastor it was a return to his flock with a wallet full, not of indulgences like that of Johann Tetzel, the Dominican, of Luther's day, but of doings and sufferings. How he would be able to point his sermons with what he had seen and heard! How he would inflame the whole forest with it! The fires, the murders, the even blacker horrors of the sack of Magdeburg, should be caught up into the trumpet of his prophecy and belched forth in his own sonorous, if not altogether silvery voice, till every valley of Thüringen

and every hamlet in the hills rang with the fame and the shame of the Edict. He conceived himself as a brand plucked from a literal burning. As he rode, innumerable texts rose to his remembrance; and pathways of thought, full of intricacies, opened out therefrom, till his head almost ached by reason of the fixity with which he gazed upon the hinder seat of the coach, while in his imagination he saw a mass of upturned faces on the hill-side upturned to *him*. The beauty of the morning and the monotony or interest of the road were not for him.

Nor did they affect the Saxon maid-servant, who from her high perch behind the coach could see every now and then the steel caps of the troopers in front glancing in the sun, and, when she felt sure the Herr Pastor was not thinking about her, she twisted her stout body about and twisted her short neck till she could win a good satisfying look at the foremost couple of horsemen behind him. As for her companion, the high-born lady's tiring woman, the Saxon girl could make nothing of her. She belonged to the east, she said. The Saxon girl had once been to Dresden. Further east was a mystery of all manner of strange peoples. The woman spoke German, but she did not look German, and she did not chatter, an unhealthy sign to the mind of the Saxon girl. She had not a look for the troopers nor for the country-side. She was thinking of the little hoard of florins and kreuzers she had left in the hands of a respectable goldsmith before she set out on this ridiculous journey with the highly-born lady, who, subject to the god of greed, owned her body and soul. The writings relative to the hoard were in a little bag, which she wore in a secure place beneath her outward and visible garments. Every now and again she pinched the spot to make sure they were there: a fact the Saxon girl noticed, but forbore to question for the reason.

For the lady and the farmer's daughter the road had different messages. Both in their ways felt the loveliness of the morning and the welling up of Spring in the blood. To the lowlier-born a little farmstead with its yellowish clayed walls and great black beams, its thatch of many seasons' straw, spoke of men and women and babes and kine. Then she remembered, and called softly out of the window "Pastor Rad," and the pastor urged his horse beside her and said a few words, but soon dropped behind again. She could make nothing of him. He did not even ask after her wound.

And "dark Otilie" of Thüringen? The beauty of the morning set her pulses thrilling, and chanted in her ears a song of freedom. She knew well that she was not free, that she was playing the rebel against all orthodoxy of courts and the rule of princes for their women-folk. She had but these few weeks essayed the game of freedom, which had already led her into strange accidents, but danger and Spring and pride made a heady mixture. She loved this flat open road because it was new to her, and led to strange little towns. "Did that stupid old General Tilly recognise her?" She asked herself the question, and answered that these old generals and statesmen were all full of craft and ruse, and it was impossible to say. Why, if he did, should he let her go? Then her thoughts evidently fell upon the Scot: and, since he showed no sign of coming to her of his own accord, she had the word passed to him. Nigel wheeled his horse and waited till the coach was abreast. The coach was high and he needed not to bend. He saluted and said—

"Madame?"

"What is the name of this place we make for?"

"Strassfurt!"

"Is it much farther?"

"A league or so, madame!"

"And then?"

"We shall dine and proceed to Aschersleben. Then, if you are not too fatigued, we shall go on to Sangershausen." Then he looked across to Elspeth and a look of friendliness came into his eyes. "How is your wound to-day, Fraülein?"

"Better! Much better, captain!" Elspeth had another access of blushes.

"Of a truth," said "dark Otilie" to herself, "there must have been some passages between this gentleman and our pastor's niece;" and she herself began to observe him more closely, how well he sat his horse, what a figure he had, as gallant a soldier as she remembered to have seen.

"Captain!" She threw aside her haughtiness for a moment as she would have dropped a cloak when she had loosed the clasp. "Whence came you?"

"From Scotland, madame!"

"The country of Marie Stuart?"

"She was the grandmother of our present king, Charles!"

"And what brought you here?"

"A younger son's lack of fortune, and a taste for sword-play!"

"But surely at the English court!"

"There were already too many Scots, too many younger sons, and a king who had no taste for sword-play, madame!"

"They say the English ladies are rich and beautiful! Were there none who would keep a Scottish gentleman from crossing the seas to find a fortune, when she held one in her lap?"

"I would not have looked beyond her face, madame, and, wanting a fortune of my own, would never have looked her in the face to ask for hers."

"You are too proud, sir! And how long have you plied the trade of a soldier?"

"Since Wallenstein raised his army and fought with Mansfeld. Five years, madame!"

A strange rapt gleam came into her eyes at the name of Wallenstein.

"And the fortune?" she asked.

"My Lord Verulam in his book tells us 'if a man look sharply and attentively he shall see Fortune: for though she be blind yet she is not invisible,'" said the Scot. "I am still looking for her."

"It is a good saying: and your Lord Verulam plainly had a shrewd notion that Fortune walks abroad in petticoats as often as she hides herself in the treasure-house of a king."

Nigel Charteris looked into her face, wondering exactly what she meant by her commentary, and the dark eyes held a lurking demon of laughter somewhere about them for an instant, but the mist came over the twin lakes and her face resumed its lofty repose.

They were not the only wayfarers: though the little groups were getting more and more infrequent. For the final attack on Magdeburg, which had let loose into its streets and places thousands of soldiery on plunder intent, careless of violence to women and to babes, had also opened its gates for the egress of fugitives. Those who had friends or relatives in the country made such haste as was possible in the deadly hubbub of the sack to steal out with their bare lives on to the roads and walk fast and far.

Many were the glances of hate at the troopers, and of wonder at Elspeth Reinheit, who was known to many as the "pastor's niece." As for the young pastor, the fugitives bowed or curtsied to him, and pitied him because they supposed him a prisoner; whereas they themselves

possessed a precarious freedom, won out of the press of death that had confronted them in so many forms on the grisly days of the sack.

The pastor, buried in his indignation, and in his thoughts of stirring themes for congregations not yet assembled, sometimes acknowledged their salutations, sometimes missed seeing them. One question in the intervals of his professional wrath came into his mind every now and again, and he was indignant at the intrusion. It was this: What had happened that Elspeth should have had any dealings with Tilly's captain? He had seen how her eyes had sought the captain's, the eyes of an accursed Catholic, accursed in that his hands were imbrued, actually or vicariously, in the bloody wine-presses of the wrath of man, still more accursed that he had done what he had in furtherance of the policy of Rome. And Elspeth Reinheit, though not formally betrothed to him, Pastor Rad, was looked upon as his by others than himself or herself. How was it possible that the soldier and she could have met, and he the pastor and lover not know it? how could there be a look of understanding or of gentle inquiry pass from her to him to his own exclusion? It filled him with vague uneasiness. It hurt his pride of possession. It raised suspicion of her integrity.

No doubt Pastor Rad would have been still more surprised had he known that the highly-born sympathiser—he was not sure enough of her spiritual leanings to call her adherent,—Otilie of Thüringen, was at this moment questioning Elspeth on that very matter.

“Dearest Elspeth, you have met yonder captain before yesterday? I am sure of it.” She nodded towards his back as he trotted forward to the head of his men after the little conversation.

“That is true!” said Elspeth. “There is no need to

keep it secret from you, though I dare not tell Melchior Rad. He would never understand."

"As to that," said her companion, "I cannot advise you. You know the pastor. But your eyes have a most eloquent speech of their own, and are not easily veiled, and, when he and I carried you to your chamber, your eyes sought the captain's, and I could have sworn your pastor marked it."

"Oh dear!" said Elspeth. "And he is so harsh; well, not exactly harsh, but you know what I mean."

"These good men are hard in judgment!" said the other. "Like diamonds for rarity and hardness. As for sparkle . . . well, I should not say Pastor Rad sparkles, but never mind."

"This is Thursday!" said Elspeth. "Well, it was on Tuesday night and nearly midnight. I had been sitting watching my uncle in too great anxiety to leave the dear old man, and went down into the kitchen to make him a warm posset.

"As I crept into the kitchen in my night-rail and slippers, my hair down even, imagine, Ottilie, with a candle in my hand, a man stood there in the outer doorway. He seized my hands in his and looked me straight in the face, the candle-light between us.

"'No word, maiden!' he said in a low tone. 'Give me food! Give me a couch to lie upon! I am wearied to death!'

"His face was blackened with smoke and streaked with sweat. His cloak and doublet and gauntlets were stained with I know not what. His voice was hoarse and weak. He was clearly wellnigh done for. I was frightened out of my life, but not out of all pity. And he was young and had fine eyes, Ottilie. What could I do?"

"And what did you do?"

“‘If thine enemy hunger, feed him,’” said Elspeth. “I did not ask him on which side he fought. I gave him bread and meat and drink, and took him by the little stairs to my own chamber. It was the only safe place, and I bade him sleep there till I wakened him in the morning.

“I spent the night watching my uncle and dozing by his bedside. In the morning, when it was an hour past dawn, I thought of my other charge and went to my chamber. He was gone.”

“God in heaven!” said Ottilie. “And that was the captain there?”

“I could not swear to it!” said Elspeth, blushing again. “I think it was.”

“It is possible also that he came back to the house to see what had happened to you on the second day of the sack!”

“I wonder if he did,” said Elspeth. “I should like to think so!”

CHAPTER V.

TWO OF THE CATHOLIC FAITH.

STRASSFURT gave the travellers too poor an entertainment to make them tarry by it. They got a change of horses and pushed on another ten miles, the ground rising steadily as they began to leave the plains and cross the eastern spurs of the Harz mountains. At Aschersleben the air was noticeably purer and laden with the resinous smell of the pines. They made a long rest here for the evening meal and then rode slowly, for the troopers' horses were tired and sore with the weight of men and mail. The lieutenant made his men walk up the steep hills, but it was late when they clattered and rumbled into little Sangershausen and came to a good inn in the shadow of St Ulrich.

The inn was not large but the stables were spacious enough to take in all the troopers as well as their horses: a fortunate thing, since, at the late hour it was, to have made any endeavour to quarter them on the inhabitants would have been a possible cause of tumult. They were already sufficiently near to Thüringen, a Protestant state in the main, for Protestant feeling to be uppermost. Some news of the vengeance executed on Protestant Magdeburg would have preceded the travellers even at this remote town on the borders of the Harz, and Nigel and the

lieutenant were both aware of the danger they ran, peaceful as their errand was.

Despite their fatigue they set off again early, covering the ten miles to Frankenhäusen with ease. Then the road began to wind in and out among the hills, which lay across their path to Erfurt. The lower slopes of the hills already showed corn ripening; the grass stood knee-deep in the valleys, but above the cornlands on every hillside rose the forest. There were a few woodcutters in the forest, a labourer or two here and there in the fields, and at long intervals tiny hamlets, with perhaps a mill or an indifferent inn. To the travellers one and all, the continuous ascents to high ground, the long forest roads, the descents into new valleys, became monotonous and seemingly interminable. They made no haste. It was no countryside for haste. At the best Nigel expected to reach Erfurt at sundown: for the horses had not thrown off the weariness of yesterday, and they could not expect to get a relay for the coach. At the inn where they made what midday meal the place was capable of they could get nothing but smoked ham, little tough cheeses, rye-bread and beer. Fortunately there was plenty of the latter, and the troopers made no grumbling at its quality. Elspeth Reinheit appeared to be blessed with a good appetite, and found ham and rye-bread and cheese to her liking, for she did well by them. The other and more highly-born girl ate little and drank goat's milk, which has a sustaining quality for those who can put up with its richness. Pastor Rad was no more talkative than he had been the day before, and brooded alike in valley and on hill-top with a morose perseverance that foreboded a wealth of prophetic outburst, whenever he should come to his opportunity and to his flock. He watched Nigel in all his approaches and conversation with Elspeth, which the chance or the tedium of the journey brought about.

Nigel was on his side quite natural and unconstrained in his behaviour to the girl, who had done him a vital service which he had in his turn requited. There was no feeling except that of human kindness, which perhaps runs a little thicker as between man and woman, more so still if the man be comely and the woman not less well-seeming than a woman should be.

The longest day of travel comes to an end: and at last they spied the cathedral and the sister church of Saint Severus perched on its eminence. Then the spires of St Martin, St Michael, St Laurence, and later on the walls of Erfurt, rose to view. There were gates to pass, two waterways to cross by little bridges, which let one see a wilderness of little streets, and then they drew rein at a demure hostelry in the Prediger Strasse, well thought of by the Protestant community of Erfurt.

Nigel and the lieutenant having seen their charges safely housed, rode on with their escort, and readily found quarters for them with the soldiers of the garrison; for Erfurt, if it showed no active partisanship at this time, was passively more for the Emperor than for the cause of Gustavus. Originally one of the free cities of the Hanseatic League, it had become annexed by some threads of service to the Electorate of Mainz, the Elector being the Archbishop, and so able to exercise influence, if not precisely dominion, by the spiritual arm as well as by his considerable secular forces. Despite Luther, Erfurt was still to be reckoned as a Catholic city, and not many months after this very day Gustavus treated it accordingly in the swift foray that followed his victory of Breitenfeld.

The lieutenant being by habit a good companion and a great man at a bottle, where he could find both company and bottle, having once sat down with the officers of the garrison, was in no mood to leave them. Nigel Charteris, on the other hand, like many of his fellow-countrymen,

was prone to content himself with his own company rather than make himself profoundly uncomfortable for the sake of being sociable. Wine, Woman, and Song, as the triune object of German idolatry, especially in garrisons, camps, and universities, did not evoke any enthusiasm in him.

He drank wine for good cheer. Song he could bear rather than love, so it had a lilt in it. As for woman, as she followed the camp, or in the character of the helpless quarry of the licentious chase of officers and soldiers alike, or again as the fat helpmeet of the German burgher, redundant with all the virtues but lacking equally all the graces, Nigel Charteris paid her no heed. His gorge rose from one cause or another at all three. Through all the coarse scenes of camp life, the brutalities of the sack of cities, he had preserved with religious fervour the memory of his mother, and of the maidens of gentle quality whom he had known in his own land, tall, straight-limbed women with broad foreheads and blue-grey or dark-brown eyes, looking boldly out upon a world that dared not asperse them.

In Ottilie von Thüringen he had recognised at a glance one of their peers, with less of their frankness, with more of their pride of race, a woman of rare beauty, mysterious, tangible yet intangible. For the first time in his prime of manhood did he feel troubled in spirit by the consciousness that something in him strove towards the infinite that is the spirit of woman.

But whether it was this, or the consciousness that of late he had been remiss in his devotions, he stole out beneath the intense blue of a starlit sky towards the cathedral, in the precincts of which he trusted to find a priest to hear his confession.

The builders in their desire to set their holy city on a little hill, and the only hill having a steep declivity to

more mundane levels, had constructed a series of under-buildings, called *cavaten*, till they got a continuous level on which to build the cathedral. And a penitent who has to mount a matter of fifty steps, and does so, certainly deserves well of Mother Church. So at least thought Nigel Charteris, as, somewhat breathless, he peered in and found it almost dark. A lantern standing on the floor in a corner announced the presence of some one, who proved to be the sacristan coming out of the sacristy.

By the aid of a few small coins the sacristan remembered that Father Felix lodged at the priest's house close by, and offered to fetch him. While he was gone Nigel made the round of the nave, the side-aisles, and the chancel. So lofty was the roof his eye could not pierce the gloom, but the cathedral was of no great extent, the chancel being in fact very nearly as large as the nave. The faint rays of the lantern lit up the carved and polished ages-old woodwork of the choir seats. Beyond was a shadowy land round which he walked in the space of a few minutes.

From the still deeper shadow of a group of pillars Nigel was startled by a woman's sobbing. Out of the great silence of the place it was audible, when his own footfall ceased for an instant, and then it ceased suddenly, as if the woman, learning that she was not alone, had regained command of herself. There ensued a soft murmur as of a recited prayer, one long familiar to her who prayed, and then as of some concluding personal petition, in which Nigel was almost certain that he heard the name of Albrecht von Waldstein. His mind being intent upon this name, that he should think to hear it even in this solemn environment was not in itself strange, but Nigel was inclined to regard the fancied recognition as having something of a supernatural significance.

At this moment the priest and the sacristan entered,

and the holy father and his soldier penitent entered the confessional.

When Nigel came out he walked slowly to the door, where he was joined by the priest, who, his office performed, was cheerfully curious as any layman to hear the latest details from Magdeburg. News of the victory of the Church, as every Catholic was bound to esteem it, had reached him. He was willing to hear more, but made no comment. His sympathies, it appeared, were mainly confined to his own surroundings, his personal charge in Erfurt, and did not travel outward to the greater world. He was curious to hear whether the Jesuits were jubilant over the new phase in politics. It was clear that he at least was no Jesuit. The priest *secular* has always had a certain jealousy of the priest *regular*.

Nigel received his "Pax vobiscum," and turned away to make for his quarters. A few, and those feeble, lights burned at a distance from the cathedral. There was the blue sky, starlit as when he had entered. Standing still a moment or two to make sure of his direction in this solitary part of the city, he heard a light step beside him, and a tall closely-veiled lady asked him to set her on her way to the Prediger Strasse.

Muffled as the tones were, Nigel recognised them.

"Then it was your ladyship in the cathedral a while ago?"

"Sir! I do not know of what you speak! Can you not point me to the Prediger Strasse?"

"It is useless to pretend! You are she who calls herself Ottilie of Thüringen! And you are of the Holy Catholic faith! I am Nigel Charteris!"

"Had the night been lighter," she said in a tone of vexation, "I should have asked no man! Now I am forced to confide what I wished not to tell; I *am* of your faith."

"You may trust me!" said Nigel, taking her by the arm and making across the Mainzerhof bridge over the Bergstrom, a branch of the main waterway that threads the town as a string does a row of paunchy beads from Leipzig Fair.

"'Tis not the shortest way, but it is the least lonely. Tell me why you consorted with Protestants even to the risk of death or worse in Magdeburg?"

"Captain Charteris!" She spoke in low clear tones which could reach his ear alone. "It is no article of our compact to tell you these things. It is just as well for you to know nothing. It is a great protection sometimes not to know anything."

"Count Tilly said that same thing!" said Nigel. "Is it a password of the Rosicrucians?"

"Then he warned you against me!" she said in a tone of triumph.

Nigel bit his lip for its indiscretion.

"He gave it as a piece of general advice," he said. "But what is in our compact?"

"Merely this!" she replied. "You were to conduct us to Erfurt. You were to put us into the company of trustworthy people so that we might pursue our way to Eisenach."

"That is true!" said Nigel. "Yet it is not to be wondered at if I cast about to know more of a noble lady who first tries to stab me with a dagger, then takes a passing interest in my parentage, whom next I find by an extraordinary chance sobbing in a dark corner of a cathedral, whom, finally, I have the honour of conducting to her lodging at an hour when most noble ladies are glad to be within doors." There was a vein of humour in his tone rather than in what he said.

"You think I owe it to you, sir?"

"Does woman ever owe anything to man that she does

not pay a thousand-fold? I count no woman my debtor!" He said it in a tone of tenderness she had not heard before from this soldier of fortune.

"Trust me then in turn! I tell you nothing! Believe me, there are things I dare not tell my confessor that I *could* tell you; only it is better not."

"Let it be so, madame! 'Trust me all in all or not at all' is a proverb of my country."

They had reached the further end of the street called Fischersand and turned on to the Long Bridge, from which it was but the length of a small side street to the Prediger Strasse.

They halted on the bridge and looked over the balustrade, up the waterway. There was candlelight here and there in the back windows of the houses that abutted on the water. Their gaze could only penetrate a little way along the dark space between the houses. A few stars reflected themselves in the water at their feet. The Lady Ottilie of Thüringen was in a restless mood, in that mood when a woman wants everything and nothing, when she is eager to reveal and careful to hide everything but her eagerness. To an older man perhaps there would have been no puzzle, but to Nigel Charteris, who had never known the spell of woman, she was a mysterious child following her own phantasies.

She gazed into the dark vista for a full minute or so of silence—a silence only broken by the tramp of the guard going its rounds. Then she said—

"Have you ever known what love is?"

Nigel started at the question, for he was conscious of the exaltation of spirit that he felt at being alone with this mysterious child, who was a woman who had proud eyes, that he felt at being her protector in this old garrisoned city that was strange to both of them.

"No, lady!" He spoke truth, and she knew it.

"It is like this!" she said, and pointed downwards. "It is dark and in movement, and you see stars in it glittering,—wavy stars that you know are not real, though they look so near. You know that it would be cold to plunge in, and that you would not get your stars. There are the stars above in the blue at an immense distance. . . . It's like that too!" She pointed up the waterway into the darkness. "You can see a little of the way, and then it is all dark, all a mystery, and yet you know that you are eager to go, and that if you go far enough you will expect to reach the stars."

Nigel listened and was troubled—troubled because he was not by nature a poet, and could not well follow her thought, and troubled because he felt that her note was impersonal as relating to himself. If she was referring to a particular man it was not himself.

"To think," she went on, "that a woman could be so stirred, so set above herself by any man that she would become even as his slave in return for nothing but his barest thanks, that her mind could be full of him day and night, that all he might do or say, were it to her own injury, would be right in her eyes!"

"And yours,—your mind is full of Albrecht von Waldstein, if I guess rightly?" Nigel asked.

"Sir!" She flashed upon him, turning towards the pathway. "Go you and seek your Wallenstein! What think you that Ottilie von Thüringen can have in common with that cold seeker after power, with him who would use the Habsburgs for a stepping-stone, and play the Cæsar?"

Nigel was silent. He was confident that he had struck the keynote of her meditation, but refrained from placing his finger upon it with insistence, as he might have done, from fear that he should find that she resounded to none other. For he began willy-nilly to desire that this

harpsichord of hers should give forth melody beneath his own fingers. But after a moment or two, with the directness of the Scot, without irony, stating a fact, he said—

“Lady, I would gladly be the man you spoke of!”

She turned towards him, hurling him a look through her veil.

“My tall captain! You would be a fool even to dream of it!”

“So be it!” he said in his plain way. “Here is your inn. To-morrow your escort will be here. At what hour?”

“At eight, sir, if you can so contrive.”

CHAPTER VI.

AT THE CASTLE OF HRADSCHIN.

It was not difficult to find at the sign of the Lily a couple of worthy merchants who were returning on the morrow to Gotha, and they readily promised Nigel to act as escort so far. From Gotha it would go hard if the girls did not get a safe journey to Eisenach.

The parting was brief. Some tears sprang to the ready eyes of Elspeth. Otilie's eyes showed nothing. Her lips repeated, "Till we meet again, captain!" The pastor nodded sulkily. No sooner had the coach rumbled off than Nigel sprang to his saddle, and together with his comrade, the lieutenant, and the escort, trotted to the merry jingle of the accoutrements and the clash of hoofs out of Erfurt over Steiger Hill on the road for Rudolfstadt. In consultation with some of the garrison he had planned to ride through the forest to Rudolfstadt, thence to Plauen, pass the night there, cross the Erzgebirge on the next day, and push into Bohemia as far as Pilsen; by good fortune they might be at Budweis on the evening of the third day and in Vienna by the afternoon of the fourth.

After surmounting Steiger the road lay straight enough across a broad valley through a round dozen of hamlets, and at the tenth mile they crossed the Ilm and began

to ascend a more winding road, which, six miles farther, brought them to Rudolfstadt. Here they made their midday meal, and without delaying over the wine-pot, made good speed into the hills that lay between them and Plauen, the chief city of the Vogtland. The Vogt had been careful to choose a high country for his dwelling, and so the horses found it no easy finish to their day's work to climb as they had to do to bed and fodder.

So far Nigel had paid little heed to any demonstrations of Lutheran spirit. Erfurt, for all it had nursed Luther out of monkhood into flat heresy, was still Catholic. Rudolfstadt was towards the outskirts of the Thüringer Wald and a mere hamlet, though it bore a kingly name. The other villages that lay between it and Plauen were inconsiderable, and Nigel did not let his men linger when traversing them. It was quite possible that the news of the sack of Magdeburg had preceded him, but it was unlikely that any force of the soldiers of Gustavus or of his allies were in the neighbourhood, and against any undisciplined throng of turbulent Protestants Nigel felt secure, if he were not greatly outnumbered.

But as soon as the gates closed behind him and his men, he became aware from the looks of the people and their answers to his questions that he had come into a very hornet's nest. Arms seemed to be the customary wear, and in at least two of the squares he noticed stout burghers and apprentices practising drill under the guidance of men of martial bearing.

Instead of making, as he would have done, for an inn, he rode right through the town to the castle of Hradschin, which was the one place inside the town that promised security, if not good cheer, and was held on behalf of the Emperor by an officer who represented in a shadowy

way the ancient dignity and function of the Vogt of long ago.

There he found the drawbridge up and the sentinels on guard, but he was admitted without much parley to find that the officer in question was an old comrade of his Wallenstein days, one Hildebrand von Hohendorf, who received him with open arms and a full flagon, and whose eyes roamed over the twenty well-appointed troopers with much satisfaction.

The burly Commandant's eye, as he sat back in his great chair after the first part of the supper was despatched, lit upon Nigel with great good-humour.

"So you are a captain of Tilly's, my boy! And I warrant you get another step if you carry despatches safely to Vienna! Some people have all the luck. And I wager you've a good round bag of golden crowns in your wallet as it is."

"As to that," said Nigel, "I left a few odd thalers with an honest banker at Erfurt. I know better than to carry much gold about me."

"Sly fellows, you Scots! Ha! ha! ha! A few odd thalers! Why, the sack of miserly Madgeburg must have been like drawing water in a bucket from a brimming well! And here I sit cooped up in Hradschin, and draw a few groschen a day for running the risk of a Lutheran bullet, or a crack from a sledge-hammer every time I go into the town, and the saints above know when I shall be able to get back to the wars."

"Why didn't you do the same as the others, and join Tilly?"

"In the first place, I got the offer of Hradschin, and in the second place, my own little estate of Hohendorf is but a few miles to the north, over by Elsterberg, and I can keep a better eye upon it than if I were wandering about with Tilly. And in the third place, when one has served

with Wallenstein, it isn't the same thing to serve with Tilly."

"And in the fourth place, Hildebrand, you seem to have a good larder and a good cellar!"

Hildebrand laughed a hearty contented laugh.

"I like them better than your Restitution Edict! Well, Hendrick?"

A soldier had come in and stood at attention.

"There is a tumult in the town, Commandant. They have assembled on the other side of the moat with torches and weapons."

"Bid them all go to the devil and come back to-morrow morning!"

"Yes, Commandant!"

The soldier returned in a few minutes.

"They will have speech with you, Commandant!"

"Confound them all for disturbers of the peace! I am coming. This is a new caper!"

The Commandant donned his corselet and headpiece, and accompanied by Nigel came out on the roof of a small tower that overlooked the drawbridge.

There was the moat below and a narrow one at that. But it was a sufficient barrier.

"Silence for the Commandant!" shouted the sergeant of the guard. There was silence in the grim-looking crowd that stood many deep on the other side, torches and lanterns lighting up the faces of some and leaving others mere shadowy patches, lighting up, too, the faces of many steel weapons and the barrels of many firelocks.

"Now Johann Pfarrer! In God's name tell us what this is all about, and let a man get back to his supper!"

"Magdeburg!" shouted Johann Pfarrer with a voice like a deep-toned trumpet.

"Aye! Magdeburg!" The crowd echoed and roared it lustily with a curious note of wild anger in the throat.

"Well, friends? What have I to do with Magdeburg?"

"Just this!" said Johann Pfarrer. "To-night we have heard an exact relation of the sack of Magdeburg. You have with you one of Tilly's captains and twenty of his hell-born riders."

"Faith, Johann! you may be right! I don't know where they were born. They are all good Germans!"

"The more shame!" growled Johann. "Now, Commandant, we are not joking. Deliver them all up to us, officers and men!"

"For what? Who ever heard of a German delivering up his guests? Tut! tut! man!"

"There is no 'Tut! tut!' about it," retorted Johann. "We are going to hang them. Blood for blood! Vengeance for Magdeburg!"

"What nonsense you talk," said Hildebrand in his jolly cajoling fashion. "Why should you or I trouble about Magdeburg? Let the Brandenburgers look after themselves. You don't owe them anything!"

"They are our brothers in the faith," said another voice, and a Lutheran pastor stood out from the throng.

"Yes! Yes! Our brothers in the faith." The bystanders took up the cry till it reached the outskirts of the throng, seemingly a long way back.

"Well! I take my orders from the Emperor!" said Hildebrand. "You had better go and ask him! I give up my guests for no one. Now go away home to your suppers and your wives and don't trouble your heads with politics!"

"You hear, friends?" shouted Johann, turning to his comrades. "You hear what Commandant von Hohendorf tells us. Shall we?"

"No! A thousand noes!" was the reply from hundreds of throats, and the ominous rattle of weapons gave it

emphasis. "Storm the castle! Burn down old Hradschin! Death to the hell-riders," came from all sides.

Nigel, standing on the battlements in the rear of the Commandant, was not recognisable from below, but could very well distinguish the faces of most of those who stood in the front of the throng. They were drawn from all classes in the town, which, it was clear, was stirred to its depths. There were few women, and only two of these had ventured near to the leaders. Nigel surveyed the assembly with the indifference of the soldier to the execrations of a crowd of citizens, and the added feeling of detachment from the exasperation which they felt at the slaughter of some of their own countrymen by others of their own countrymen in the pay of the Emperor, who was far on the other side of the mountains. His curiosity was alert, however, and when his eyes rested on the two women, whose heads were enveloped in hoods that left most of the face in impenetrable shadow, he strove to estimate their condition, whether gentle or simple. In bearing they both seemed apart from the burghers with whom they mingled. One of them was tall for a woman, and, when she moved, did so with a gesture that marked her at least as no housewife. The other's movements were quick, and reminded Nigel of a hen moving and pecking with sudden jerks of fussiness. Then for a moment, as the Commandant was speaking, the tall woman looked upward and the ruddy light from a neighbouring torch fell upon her face for a mere instant, but it was long enough. Nigel drew his cloak about him with a shiver. The woman appeared to have the eyes and mouth of Otilie von Thüringen.

He was sure it was not she. She had started for Gotha. He had seen her in the coach, and at the head of his men had ridden, not, it was true, at breakneck speed, but at a good pace, wasting no time.

Some one, it was clear, had arrived in the town who had witnessed the sack of Magdeburg, and striven to and contrived to inflame the townspeople to a fever point. But even supposing, what was impossible, that the mysterious Otilie had ridden by other roads and reached Plauen at his heels, what could her errand be? She was a Catholic. It was unthinkable to believe that she could be seeking to inflame the minds of Protestants to the butchery of a score of troopers in the service of the Emperor out upon a peaceful task of escort duty.

It passed through his mind and was dismissed. Hildebrand turned to him.

"The pigs! They will be less noisy in the morning. Let us go in and finish our wine. Hradschin can stand a few hard words and even a few knocks such as they can give, unless Gustavus sends them a few cannon."

As they went in the tumult grew in volume, but it was soon lost to their ears as they once more resumed their wine within the thick walls.

"The devil of it is," said the Commandant, "that there will be no getting out of the place while they are in this mind. They will guard all the roads. And your men are all needed here if they make an attack in force to-morrow."

"The despatches do not admit of delay," said Nigel, who had no mind to be cooped up in Hradschin for a week. "If I cannot leave with the men, I must leave without them."

"But how are you going to get out of the town? You must cross the river, and the bridge will be guarded. There's your horse, too. Still, as you say, there are the despatches."

"Surely, if I start two hours before dawn, I can get the gates open after overpowering the guard. My twenty

troopers ought to manage that. How far is it from here to the bridge?"

"Four hundred yards! But four hundred yards, of which at least a hundred are down a narrow street to the bridge-head, supposing the pigs are on the watch, are as bad as four miles. You know what it is to ride through a press of people. You and your troopers would be pulled from your horses in no time. We must think! Pass the flagon, comrade!"

"Lieutenant! Make the round of the ramparts with one of the Commandant's soldiers and see what the dispositions are, whether one can leave the castle and how. One cannot make one's plans for leaving the town if one cannot first leave the castle."

"True!" said Hildebrand, who was secretly desirous of retaining the twenty troopers to defend Hradschin. "And sound your men as to whether they will risk a rope with Captain Charteris or remain here with me."

Nigel would have been inclined to resent this, but as Hildebrand was his host he said nothing, only being quite resolved that in the end his men should obey orders, hanging or no hanging.

Then they fell to discuss the road Nigel should take.

"Pilsen is a long journey through the hills!" said the Commandant. "Why not make for Eger? There is a strong garrison at Eger. If you reach there in safety you can get another escort to Vienna, and when things are quiet your men can slip out and go there to await your return. In this way the Commandant made it a more familiar idea to Nigel's mind that he should go alone. And Nigel, on his part, resolved that alone, or accompanied, it would be easier to escape that night, when the citizens would be drowsy with their unwonted watching, say two hours before dawn, than on the morrow when the threatened attack began. The heart of the difficulty to

his mind would be the gate at the bridge-head. Even if the guard were overcome there would still be delay, and delay would be fatal.

The lieutenant returned and reported that watch-fires were lit and burning at all the four avenues which gave egress from the neighbourhood of the castle, and at each was a strong guard, all armed with muskets. Any one coming from the castle could be seen. The crowd had dispersed.

The three soldiers put their heads together over a plan of the town, and Nigel asked question after question till he had extracted all the facts he could from the Commandant. Then he asked the Commandant for the quickest-witted of his men, and sent for Sergeant Blick, one of the escort, by special request of Nigel, who had great confidence in his fidelity.

In a quarter of an hour the two men dropped into a flat-bottomed boat kept at a small back gate of the castle for the convenience of the kitchens. And mooring it carefully on the other side, they stood half-way between the fires and the guards to the north and those to the south. The soldier belonging to the castle tapped at a window in the street which faced the castle again and again. Presently the knock was answered. The casement opened. The soldier got through, and burly Sergeant Blick waited for the door to open. Then he entered too. A few words with the goodwife, who supplied the soldiers of the garrison with spiced sausages, and they departed through a door at the back of the house into a darkness that could scarcely have been bettered.

As the clock of the Rathhaus struck one past midnight there gathered in its shadows a knot of men. By a quarter past there were twenty, and at half-past there were forty. Every man came by himself and stealthily, and every man came armed, and was surprised to find so many

others there before him, except only the first three, and they were very old in comradeship. As each man came up he murmured "Waldstein," and waited in the gloom in silence.

As the clock of the Rathhaus struck one past midnight Sergeant Blick and two or three men who, like him, knew something about horses, were as silently as possible yoking horses, and in some cases oxen, which had complacently folded their legs and gone to sleep chewing the cud as industriously as usual, to the waggons that stood in the market street and market-place. The noise of horses and waggons clattering or creaking was nothing to the dwellers in that part of the town.

One of the ostlers led away a waggon creaking and rumbling. The ostler was a good Catholic, and had a solid crown piece in his breeches. Then the other led away a waggon. Then when the first ostler had returned, Sergeant Blick started, and by half-past one eight waggons were disposed across the streets that led to the castle and not far from the men round the watch-fires. The horses were brought back again.

At half-past one the men in the shadows of the Rathhaus saw one who walked like a soldier come towards them, and as he halted just outside the shadows they could see the glint of his casque and heard him call them sharply to attention. In a trice they had arranged themselves in two lines as they had been used to do in Wallenstein's army. They had no doubt it was one of Wallenstein's officers, and one or two thought they remembered the voice.

They marched without hesitation towards the castle, and creeping past the waggons ranged up again in order. One or two of the guard not so overcome with sleep as the others—for your watch-fire, especially if it be smoky, as it can easily be, is a monstrous soporific—glanced round

uneasily at the clink of arms and peered into the shadows and saw nothing. Then came a word of command, and, before they could all spring to their weapons, Nigel and his levy were upon them, had beaten every man to the earth, scattered the watch-fire where it would, and then, re-forming, passed on. They halted in front of the draw-bridge of the castle. It was let down, and nineteen troopers and the lieutenant came over the moat and formed up. Nigel said a word to the lieutenant and passed on with his footmen till he sighted the second watch-fire. Once again his besom of men swept the watchers, and this time they were caught by the barricade of waggons, and every man, who was not laid flat and helpless by sword or pike or stave, was trussed up till further need. The waggons were dragged aside, and the horsemen trotted towards the narrow street that led to the bridge-head and the old soldiers marched behind as a rearguard, still led by Nigel. When they got within bowshot of the gate the horsemen rode down upon the guard and made them deliver up the keys.

The gates were opened. Nigel sprang to the spare horse, and said a thankful farewell to the old soldiers and to Plauen.

His last words to the old soldiers had been—

“If Wallenstein wants you again, will you come?”

And every man had growled out, “Aye, with a will!”

CHAPTER VII.

THE ROAD TO EGER.

ONCE clear of the town and on the open road to Olsnitz Nigel's immediate anxiety was ended. He did not fear the pursuit of the townspeople. Not despicable in quality is the valour which rouses and fills a man, and a man's fellows, in sight of their common hearthstone at the Rathhaus, or of that, possibly dearer, rallying-place the Rathskeller, where the favoured vintages of the burghers lie snug in cobwebs, only to be brought forth from the complete darkness of their resting-places to the still dim and broken daylight of the afternoon, or to the lantern-light cloven by the massive pillars of the low arches into patches of ruddy glow and pools of shadow. Not despicable in quality is it, but it carries a mighty stroke only within the town's walls. To pursue with success a troop, however small, of trained mounted men, one must have the like. Nigel and his men rode on into the darkness, which was just sufficiently permeated by the faint light of stars to let them see the road at their horses' feet and a few yards ahead; they rode sleepily, but feeling secure. The road they followed was the road to Hof, which a few miles out throws out a branch to Olsnitz, and this again at Olsnitz fathers two younglings, the road to Graslitz and Pilsen, and the road to Eger.

Nigel meant to bivouac by the roadside, beneath the pine-trees, where the bed was soft with the pine-needles and dry, and horses and men alike could sleep till an hour after dawn. He was not in the mind to lock himself in any more walled cities till he was in safer country. He had also resolved to make for Eger rather than Pilsen, because, from Eger, which was a frontier post of some quality, he could perhaps send Hildebrand von Hohendorf some assistance.

So having put an hour's riding between his troops and Plauen he called a halt, and the men led their horses up the sloping banks into the forest, where they unsaddled, tethered their horses, and lay down quite contentedly. Nigel, with his head on his saddle-bags and two sentries within hail, was asleep in a few seconds. A few seconds of sleep, so it seemed to the sleep-hungered soldier, and the persistent twittering of the birds, that outburst that hails the almost imperceptible rolling up of the night clouds, awoke him. The birds could see up there in the branches. Where he lay it was dark enough to swear it was still night. Out of the darkness he heard the voice of Sergeant Blick drowsily calling the birds "fools and heretics" for waking him, and he fell asleep again. Another two or three seconds, which were an hour by the clock at Olsnitz, and the birds, after their last nap, were again calling one another to the duty of seeing after breakfast. Nigel rose and stamped his feet and shook himself, listened for the trickle of a spring, and went off to salute it. Then he returned to his saddle and called for his horse. While this was being brought he put his hand into his saddle-bags where he carried the bulky despatches of Count Tilly: first the left, and then the right, then he searched his doublet, his holsters. There were no despatches. Sleep had played him traitor, delivered him bound into the enemy's hand. Into whose?

Nigel was possessed of common-sense, but when common-sense could give but a flimsy explanation, he was not disinclined to allow that the powers of darkness and witchcraft might, notwithstanding King Jamie and his pronouncements, be of some potency. He was cautious too. While not suspecting any of his men, he thought that to keep the loss to himself was the surest way to discover the culprit, if he was among them. So he made no inquiry of the sentries. He had a sure memory, so clear and flawless, that he could repicture himself as in a mirror placing the papers in his saddle-bag. They were there when he placed his head upon the saddle. They were not there now. He searched his lair for any sign that it might give. There was still the impress where he had lain upon the pine-needles but nothing else. The loss was inexplicable as it was irreparable. His professional honour was in jeopardy. His reputation as an officer of approved sagacity was gone. He must go on. There was no help. He must go on and carry to the Emperor the tale of his misfortune, which would sound but a sorry one in the light of Vienna, and, instead of the despatches, such details as he could remember; wherein his excellent memory would doubtless replace all that Count Tilly could have set down. But Tilly's foreshadowed plans? Tilly's recommendation of himself? Into whose hands had they fallen?

If witches had stolen the despatches, were they Protestant witches? No Catholic could be a witch. That was an incompatibility.

The men paraded in the road, and he and the lieutenant looked them over to see that every man was there and in marching order. And Nigel scanned every face and pair of hands.

No! They were as respectable a lot of ruffians in

leather and headpiece as one could pick. The order was given to ride, and they rode clanking into Olsnitz, where at the first inn they demanded beer and sausages and bread with the clamour born of a fast of eight hours and a night in the forest.

Nigel and his comrade were hungry too, and having satisfied the hunger for food, he summoned the ostler, taking him inside and questioning him if travellers had passed that way earlier in the morning.

"Three! Two stayed on the road. The third came for a small truss of hay and paid for it and went away again. He was not of these parts."

"Which road did he take?"

"The road to Eger."

Nigel asked other questions, but the answer told him nothing except that he got a minute description of the man and of the horse, the latter more particularly being the ostler's business. It was a sorrel with one black hoof and three white. There were other marks, but that was enough.

Evidently the travellers were going far, and wished to go fast, and not to call at any inn for the space of a horse's feed and watering.

Nigel wasted no time getting to horse again. One of those three had the despatches. He must overtake them. So he rode on briskly, wondering who would steal them and why. To the first question he answered: "The Protestants! For they would be in communication with Gustavus, and would wish to be beforehand in the matter of Tilly's plans."

But why should they take the road to Eger when Gustavus was far to the north? Rather should they ride north to Saxony. The road, however, was plain enough along the valley of the Elster, always rising a little, and steep hillsides on either bank. Of bridle-

tracks there were many without doubt, for those who knew the intricacies of the pine-covered hills. But it was not likely the three unknown would take to them.

At Adorf, Nigel learned that three horsemen had passed an hour before. He was gaining upon them then. His men were somewhat surprised that the march was being forced, but they scented rest and a German trooper's welcome at Eger. Ten miles farther they had gained another half-hour. Either the three had become careless, or their horses were tired, or they were poor horsemen. Nigel would have them in the net at Eger, and rode at a great pace. At one point, where the road took a wide bend, he even caught sight of three horses, mere little black spots on the white line of the road, and then he lost them. Trees intervened. At the long last he saw them clearly enough pass through the gate of Eger, and in a few minutes he and his troop clattered through the archway, and saw only that the town had swallowed them up. There was still a sorrel horse with one black hoof and three white ones for a clue.

Nigel bade the lieutenant find quarters for the night, and let the men eat and enjoy themselves. He also privately instructed Sergeant Blick to find the sorrel horse and not miss getting into converse with its rider, nor let him go before he could see him. Then he rode up to the castle, the citadel of the town. He sought the commandant, and was surprised to find in him a fellow-countryman, one David Gordon, a lean, lantern-jawed fellow, whose uniform bespoke the professional soldier, but whose talk reminded Nigel of the ultra-sanctimonious burghers of Edinburgh, on whom the spirit of Knox in its narrowness had descended, but not the fire of his conviction, while gaining a smoky stubbornness and sourness of which Knox would have been little proud.

"Sae yer Coont Tilly has warstled through into Magdeburg, Meester Charteris?"

"Aye, has he!" said Nigel, watching the cold glint of the little eyes beneath the heavy brows.

"And ye'll be carrying the despatches to the Emperor!"

"Yes!"

"Hooch aye!" The commandant rubbed a bristly chin, and watched Nigel's face. "Did ye have a peaceful journey?"

"Not exactly! I had trouble to get out of Plauen, and I think you should send Commandant von Hohen-dorf a couple of companies. The townsfolk are out of hand."

"Ah! ha!" said the other. "'Tis the working of God's wrath at the sinful deeds at Magdeburg!"

If David Gordon had been weighing out spices in a little shop in the Canongate, the speech would have had its right surroundings. As it was, issuing from the mouth of one of the Emperor's officers, it sounded out of place.

"Master Gordon! That's a queer speech!" said Nigel. "Count Tilly's been carrying out the Edict."

"Aye! That's just it, the most abominable Edict. Save us, mebbe ye're a Papist yersel!"

"Yes! Or I should not be doing the Emperor's service!" Nigel retorted with some heat.

"Whisht! Whisht! man! A man must look to the bawbees, ye ken; but he should aye hould fast to his opeenions!"

"'Tis not for me to say what Mr Gordon should do, or not do," said Nigel dryly. "My creed is where I take my pay, there I fight, and as for the cause I say nothing."

"Aye!" said Commandant Gordon with something like a sigh. "And what brought ye to Eger, when it was a wheen shorter by Pilsen?"

He scrutinised Nigel with a long careful scrutiny.

"That I might tell you how matters stood with Hohen-dorf. Yours is the nearest garrison."

"Hooch aye!" The commandant appeared to be relieved of some anticipated trouble. "I dinna think I can spare ony, but ye've done your duty in reporting it. I thocht ye were maybe paying a veesit to yon warlock the new Duke keeps at his hoose!"

"What new Duke?"

"Waldstein! Man! Waldstein! Duke of Friedland and the haill rickmatick!"

"Waldstein!" said Nigel. "Here? Waldstein?"

"Aye! He's studying the stars, he and his warlock. He's naething else to do. He's just a spent cannon-ball: good iron but useless. Speiring at the stars will he come back again or no, and speiring at Gustavus of Sweden whether he'll give him all the kingdoms of the earth and the glory of them, if he falls doon and worships him."

"How do you know that he sends letters to Gustavus? Or what is in them?"

"Is it sae unlikely?" the other questioned cunningly. "I could believe onything of a Popish recusant! Waldstein was born a Protestant of good Lutheran parents, and ganged to a Protestant University—Altdorf—and then he wins clean over to the Papists. Noo I'm not saying onything against Papistry, though I dinna believe in it mysel', but *ye* come of a Catholic family and have never known the truth. I peety but I dinna blame!"

"I am your very humble servant, Mr Gordon," said Nigel, bowing. "I am in need of food and lodgment. Good-bye!"

Nigel took horse again and rode down into the town, pondering many things.

At the foot of the hill he met Sergeant Blick.

"The sorrel horse, captain, is in a stable at the White Lamb."

"Good. We start to-morrow morning at dawn. Therefore have every man ready!"

"Yes, captain!"

"The man who rides the sorrel horse will ride northward before dawn. By whichever gate he passes, he must be caught and made to ride with us, whether he likes it or not, without noise or fuss."

"Yes, captain!"

"Where is the lieutenant?"

"He is at the Blue Angel, captain!"

"Good! To-morrow at dawn!"

Nigel found the lieutenant sitting down to a dish of scrambled eggs with a plentiful dressing of chopped ham.

"There is veal to follow, and then a couple of ducks!" said the lieutenant, concluding the remark with a great gurgle of beer in the recesses of a huge tankard.

Nigel made haste to catch up with the lieutenant.

He had travelled with his comrade through the egg country, the calf country, and had reached duckland. Two legs, a slice of the broad brown back, and some delicate spinach loaded up his plate, when the door opened and a man-servant with the bearing of a soldier entered.

"Captain Charteris!"

"That is I!" said Nigel.

"The Count Albrecht von Waldstein desires the favour of your company for an hour."

CHAPTER VIII.

INTERLACING DESTINIES.

NIGEL looked ruefully at the duck.

"Stay and eat it, comrade!" said the lieutenant.

"I must leave it! One does not keep Waldstein waiting! I bequeath it to you. See that you give a good account of it."

"That I can promise you!" said the still hungry lieutenant. "At dawn, you said?"

"At dawn! And give a good look at the horses before you turn in!"

Then casting his cloak about him Nigel went out into the deepening twilight.

Nigel Charteris had once, and only once, spoken to Wallenstein face to face. For although Nigel served as a subaltern all through the great campaign, the large armies commanded by the great general operated over tracts of country often miles apart, and months elapsed between one glimpse of him and the next. Little by little, as the great game of war had come to mean something to Nigel's mind, for at the first it had seemed but a sadly confused business, it came to him that Albrecht von Waldstein was a great player. Since his experience with Count Tilly, Nigel had been able to agree that he also was no mean

antagonist, but not the equal of Wallenstein. In that curious welter of the Thirty Years' War it wanted but little shaking of the dice-box for Tilly and Wallenstein to have been pitted against one another. As the dice fell, they never were so pitted, and by consequence what then might have happened is left to those skilful in conjecture, and not for us the chroniclers of what did happen.

Nigel, ushered by one servant to another, and finally by some great one to the presence of the great man, felt the awe that one does in meeting the supremely great in one's own profession; but as to his being a Count of the Holy Roman Empire, which the Emperor had made him, a Duke of Friedland, which by comparison was a mere proclamation of landed nobility, Nigel Charteris of Pencaitland in the Lothians cared little. The man was gentle by birth as he himself was. Whether he was a degree higher or lower was naught to a gentle Scot, for the Scot yields to no man in the pride of race.

The house was a great house, rather deep than wide, with gardens full of trees behind. At some time it had belonged to the King of Bohemia, but had been bestowed on one of the great nobles, and in the general disturbance of things ensuing upon the Winter King's invasion of Bohemia, Albrecht von Waldstein had bought it for a small part of its value. It was not the only instance of that faculty the exercise of which by the Jews has gained them the contemptuous names of brokers and Lombarders. In other words, Wallenstein became rich, had become rich, not because he was a great and successful general, but because the same talents which enabled him to plan and organise his armies, enabled him also to plan his own fortunes in matters of estate.

Wallenstein received Nigel in a spacious chamber, which had been an audience-chamber in older days. It was panelled with wood all round the walls, and the

flat ceiling was also of wood, but painted with the royal arms of Bohemia and those of the chief vassals, much of them faded and blackened. There was a great open fireplace with a goodly fire of logs blazing in it, and at a convenient distance from it was a small table, curiously carved as to the legs, a couple of flagons of wine, and two tall goblets of fine glass curiously wrought.

In a great chair sat Wallenstein, and at the door by which Nigel entered stood two serving-men.

Nigel saluted his old commander-in-chief. Wallenstein nodded, and bade a servant bring a chair.

"You were with me in the late wars?" was his question, not in the abrupt military fashion, though there were no more words, but in a tone which bespoke a certain graciousness and a certain distance.

"I was, your Grace—lieutenant, then captain of musketeers!"

"And are now with Count Tilly? You were at Magdeburg?"

"Yes! I am now riding with despatches to the Emperor!"

This was the second time he had implied that he had the despatches to deliver, knowing in fact that he had none. He had lied boldly to Gordon, the commandant who should have been a shopkeeper, and thought nothing of it. Besides, Gordon was a Protestant. He did not like lying even by implication to Wallenstein, but he had the wish not to give the great commander an ill opinion of his capacity.

"It is well!" said Wallenstein. "I do not ask you to show them to me. But I should like to know something of Count Tilly's dispositions. I am out of harness. I am enriched and decorated with titles, and put aside. The Jesuits would like to use me as a flail to beat the Protestants, but they do not want the flail for itself, or

to beat them. The flail is a passably good flail, and will not wear out yet. How many men has Count Tilly?"

"Twenty thousand foot; two thousand horse!" said Nigel promptly.

"And artillery?"

"Fifty pieces of all kinds!"

"And powder and ball and matches?"

"Sufficient store!"

"Ah!" said Wallenstein. "If Saxony and Brandenburg together make up their minds they can find work for Count Tilly. And then there is Gustavus! Who is to oppose him, and with what? Where do they say Gustavus is?"

"In Pomerania, your Grace!"

"So I have heard, and is negotiating a treaty with France! If the Protestants but knew it, they could beset Tilly and ruin the Emperor."

"But you forget the Elector Maximilian?"

"He is forgettable! He is a Jesuit, who should have been a priest, but was unhappily born a prince. He has an arm, and that arm is Pappenheim. With men enough Pappenheim could face Gustavus. But Pappenheim is with Tilly. An army can have but one head."

"When the Emperor's advisers grow frightened they will send again for your Grace!" said Nigel.

"They must pay dearly!" was Wallenstein's grim remark, with a curl of his thick lower lip. Then he asked abruptly, in a tone which suggested an amused contempt for such toys, "Do you believe in the stars?"

Had Nigel been sitting over a flagon with Hildebrand von Hohendorf instead of with Albrecht von Waldstein he would have laughed out a "No." But two experiences, the sudden apparition of Ottilie outside Hradschin, a possible delusion of the sense of sight, and the disappearance of his despatches from beneath his head in

defiance of sentries and all his senses, which was no delusion, had shaken his hitherto light esteem for witchcraft, star-gazing, horoscopes, alchemy, and all the other ingenious paltering with past and future. It had been whispered too among the armies that Wallenstein had commanded that he, like many other great ones of the time, devout Catholics all, consulted necromancers, and this came to Nigel's mind. He made a cautious reply.

"I have never had my horoscope cast. Nor do I know anything of the science of the stars. It is an old belief that the stars affect the destinies of the great ones of the earth, and it would be a presumption in me, who am nobody but a poor Scots gentleman, to treat it lightly."

"Destiny? What is it?" Wallenstein asked. "Man makes his own path out of the best materials to his hand or lets others buffet him into nothingness. There is no third way. But every man who carves his own pathway would fain learn by what implements he can arrive at the summit, so that he may use them at the earliest."

"And suppose," said the other, "the end be a cannon-ball that cuts one in two, what better is a man for knowing it two years before?"

"In truth," and into the eyes of Wallenstein came a strange look, "I know not, but there is always the grim feeling that one may stumble upon a most exact presage of fatality. It draws one on."

"Then you have made some experiments, your Grace?"

"One must do something when one has too much leisure. There is a learned master, a Jew, I think, but he tells little of his origin, who is to be found sometimes at Vienna, sometimes elsewhere, who calls himself Pietro Bramante. He commended himself to me because he hates the Jesuits. He showed skill in casting my horoscope, and has on several occasions given me good intelligence. He is here now."

Nigel involuntarily made the sign of the Cross.

Wallenstein noticed it.

"He does not traffic in devils, nor meddle with holy things. But he professes great skill in the mathematics, which he says are the root of all divination. He is learned in the Cabal, the unwritten tradition of the Jews, whereby Solomon came to know the beginning, mediety, and consummation of times."

The chamberlain of the household now came in, and bowing low said, "The learned Pietro Bramante bids me to acquaint you, my lord, that the constellations are in a favourable aspect for you to enter the House of Knowledge, but that the stranger must enter also, for the orbit of his star conjoins with your lordship's."

"Come!" said Wallenstein, his eyes lighting up into a curious eagerness, curious that is, in a man of his years, and more so to a Scot such as Nigel Charteris was, for the Scots are not given to appearing eager,—even of good fortune. And if the Scot were forty-eight, which was the tale of Wallenstein's years, and he were told that some one was ready to give him good news or bad, he would say, "Weel! weel! it'll no lose in the tellin'," and never move his legs an inch faster.

"Come! Let us see what this diviner has to say!"

Nigel was in truth by no means pleased. For he was a devout Catholic, and hated alike Jews and witchcraft, and thought little of horoscopes. The stars were a good guide on a clear night crossing a moor or in a strange country. That was all. But Wallenstein had once held all the German lands in his hands, and might again. It was a waste of opportunity not to second his whimsies: and if there was nothing in divination but hocus-pocus, why, there was no harm could come of it.

So he rose to his feet and followed: and Wallenstein led him upstairs to a long gallery, and at the farther end

was a curtain drawn across. Portraits of many kings and princesses were ranged along the one wall, and upon the other where the windows were not. The windows looked out upon a balcony and the balcony upon a pleasure, but of this, it being now night, Nigel could see little. At long intervals were lighted candles, and many unlit between. And their footfalls, soldier-like and decided, echoed by walls and ceiling, made a great noise in Nigel's ear.

So they came to the curtain and a voice bade draw, and Pietro Bramante stood there and moved not a whit. There were no candles alight near him, and all the light that was came from a copper bowl in which he burned some tow with a blue and now a green flame.

The sage began a recitation in which he made much mention of the seventh house and divers stars and constellations being in opposition or in conjunction, and of this Abracadabra Nigel made nothing. The blue and green flame played upon his naturally brownish face and it was grey, and from Wallenstein's all colour seemed to be gone; instead was his face like a parchment full of lines, all but the eyes, which glittered blackly, never losing gaze upon the sage's face. Except for the latter's utterances there was deep silence, and the three seemed to be alone, for the chamberlain had retired, having ushered them into the gallery.

Then the sage blew out the flame, and his finger faintly glowing began to be visible writing on a wall, or some flat upright surface, and the figure he made was a circle, as truly drawn an O as Messire Michelangelo Buonarrotti might have made. And the circle was of light and glowed through more strongly in one part than another.

"Behold the orbit of the life of Albrecht von Waldstein, a perfect circle. Those lines are perfect circles that make a multiple of ten. It is in every tenth year that great

causes may affect them—great upliftings of Fortune, or great fatalities.

“Now regard truly this orbit of another life, which passeth through the centre of the first,” and again with unerring finger he drew another curve, which may have been a section of a greater circle, or of an elliptical figure, or of a parabola, but it was a true curve, and cut the circle at its centre. “This orbit passeth through the field of Mars and ariseth beyond the plane of the first orbit, and this signifieth that it is the life of a stranger by blood and nation.”

So the original glowed upon the void darkness, and the new line that came from afar and passed through the centre of the circle glowed; and yet another line Pietro Bramante drew, and this time it was an oval.

“Behold now the orbit of yet another life. It is an oval and signifieth the life of a woman. An oval hath two foci, and the one is the centre of the orbit of Albrecht von Wallenstein and the other is upon the circumference of the same circle. Now the actions of woman proceed from two foci, the heart and the intelligence, and the heart focus is upon the centre of the circle and the other focus of the mind is upon the circumference or pathway of the same circle. Wherefore I deduce that this woman, whoever she be, hath her affections firmly set upon the very essence which is the spirit of Albrecht von Wallenstein, and her intelligence is set steadfastly on the orbit of his destiny so that it may go fast or slow as she willeth.

“Now, sir!” he addressed Nigel, “what was the day and hour of your birth?”

“The year 1603. The month July. The day the 7th, and the hour 7!”

“Behold figures full of portent,” said Pietro. “The year’s numerals added together give ten, which is a complete

number. Sixteen hundred and three is a multiple of seven. The month is the seventh month. The day is the seventh. The hour is the seventh. They are propitious times and should give a favourable horoscope. Now I will cast it, and calculate the orbit."

Pietro turned to his copper vessel, and by means which neither of his onlookers could guess the flame sprang up again, and taking a sheet of parchment he made calculations, and set down the fixed points his calculations showed. As the light burned, so the geometrical figures he had drawn before faded from sight.

The two sat silently. Nigel thus far was impressed against his will by the mathematical methods of the learned doctor. He stole a swift glance now and again at Wallenstein, who sat stiffly, absorbed in the doings. Nigel was more interested in the figures of the circle and of the ellipse as they applied to Wallenstein, for Wallenstein of all men was as little to be swayed by any feminine influence as any man. He had married twice. In both cases he had married a woman of noble birth, and of moderate, almost of great, fortune. But no one called Wallenstein uxorious or accused him of careless living in the article of women. No one had imputed to him that he had mistresses, or that either of his wives had ruled him. His face betrayed no tendency to passion. The eyes had no amorousness. As to the lips, if the lower lip spoke of the senses, it was rather of good living. The many lines upon his brow spoke of thought and ambition.

A smile or the semblance of a smile, and that sardonical, had passed across his face when the doctor had spoken of the mysterious woman who was to influence his life.

At last Pietro looked up from his calculations. There was a slight gleam in his worn eyes as of satisfaction, and he brought them his parchment.

"The line of this life, sirs, from the figures of the birth, when affected by the influences which the constellations exercise, must pass through these points," and he showed points upon the parchment marked with Greek letters. "Now if I join these points," and he did so with the point of his pen, "a curve is produced." Again he extinguished the flame of his lamp.

"Now, compare it with the curve I have just shown to you," and it was visible on the extinction of the other flame. "It is the same curve without doubt!"

Nigel was aware of some extraordinary exaltation of mind he could in no wise account for. With his colder intelligence he yet seemed incapable of resisting the belief that the conclusions of the reader of horoscopes were true, that his own path of life was in some momentous way linked up with that of Wallenstein, the idol of his professional admiration, and that now and here that part of his earthly path had begun.

"It seems," said Wallenstein, turning to Nigel, "that by all the rules of divination as practised by the learned doctors of these times, and in particular by Pietro Bramante, who has at divers times made notable experiments at the court of Vienna and elsewhere, you are one of those whose birth is fortunate, and that you are destined to cross my orbit at its zenith and its nadir, and to pass through the very centre of my intelligence for good or ill."

"You read aright, sir!" said Pietro. "It is beyond my power to say if for good or for ill."

"I would fain know," said Wallenstein, "if you are a good Catholic."

"I am!" said Nigel.

"And have no dealings with the Jesuits?"

"No! I have had no commerce with them at any time!"

"It is well!" said Wallenstein. "For the rest you are a soldier of fortune, and your greatest desire——"

"Is to become a trusted officer in your Grace's service, whenever it shall please the Emperor to recall you!" said Nigel heartily.

"Then let us read the presage as a fortunate one!" said Wallenstein, "and God speed the fulfilment of your desires! And now, most learned doctor, surely your powers of divination do not end here. You have spoken of some unknown lady or perchance some uncouth beldame, whom the stars have chosen to become a benign power in my life. Does not your art enable you to disclose at least her name? Tell me at least whether she is of a dark and melancholic disposition, or of a sanguine inclination."

Nigel could not tell from the dry passionless utterance of the speaker whether irony lay at the root of his tongue: but he was at least as eager as Wallenstein appeared to be indifferent as to the outcome. It was the difference between youth and maturity. If it had been permitted to look into the mind of that inscrutable man, one might have expected to find that on a stage where strode so many principal and, in their several parts, renowned actors, where war and high policy and ambition were the themes, Wallenstein should count as nothing the staying or speeding of his actions by any woman.

Pietro Bramante turned again to his lamp, which he re-lighted, and, drawing a curtain aside, the light fell upon a tall mirror of the height of a man set at such an angle that at the present it reflected nothing. At two paces from it he set a chafing-dish wherein burned glowing charcoal, and upon it sprinkled some powder from a little box of ebony; and from the dish rose up a white smoke of a sweet savour. And then Pietro recited some Latin verses, which to Nigel, unversed in such incantations, bore no meaning.

Then, before they were aware, though both gazed intently upon the smoke, the form of a majestic woman appeared to gather substance, and at length her face in all its lineaments became plain to view. The eyes gazed in a kind of ecstasy fixedly, gravely benignant, towards Wallenstein.

Nigel leaped up, spurred by his astonishment, even in opposition to the awe which the moment enjoined upon him, exclaiming "Ottolie von Thüringen!"

And Wallenstein, as if Nigel had not been there, still in his seat, but filled with amaze, exclaimed under his breath—

"Ferdinand's Stephanie!" And then, "Let me have speech of her! Dost hear! Pietro Bramante?"

But the vision had disappeared. Pietro's voice made itself audible. "This that you saw was but a vision called up by my art. I must confirm it by my mathematics."

CHAPTER IX.

AN ITALIAN AND A SPANIARD.

AN-hour before dawn came Sergeant Blick to awaken Nigel with the news, "We have the man on the sorrel horse!"

Nigel awoke completely, sprang out of bed, and was attired, even to his jack-boots and spurs, in a few minutes. Then getting astride his horse he was out of Eger and a mile on the road to Pilsen in a very few more.

"A kind of accursed Jew fellow! Some dark Moorish infidel of a heretic!" was Sergeant Blick's summing up.

Sure enough it was that learned Doctor Pietro Bramante himself.

But this was not the field of prophecy or of divination. This was the atmosphere of dawn, the kingdom of cold fact. Nigel nodded and said in his brief military manner—

"Doctor! You must please turn out your saddle-bags and your pockets for some papers which are lost. Sergeant, assist the doctor!"

The learned doctor began to protest, as might have been expected, but Nigel merely vouchsafed that it was "in the service of the Emperor." He himself searched the prisoner, whose multifarious garments made the matter

one of difficulty. And the fact that, if not an Israelite, he was a very near relation, did not make the operation to Nigel a pleasant one. But when he had finished, he was sure that nothing so bulky as Count Tilly's despatches were upon him.

Sergeant Blick produced in his turn many curious vessels and books and bottles from the saddle-bags, crossing himself at sight of anything unusual, for he had no doubt that he was dealing, if not with the Evil One, with one of his familiars. Nothing was found. Nigel with no excess of courtesy bade him pack up his belongings.

"From what town came you to Eger?"

"Even from Hof by Olsnitz!"

"And for what reason got you half a truss of hay?"

"To save the inn charges and time!"

"And your companions?"

"They rest in Eger, being bound for Gräslitz. I know them not. We did but join company for protection."

"At what inn did they rest?"

"I did not ask! Neither did I tell them that I had business with the Duke."

"Enough!" said Nigel, and wheeled his horse.

With a rueful countenance the diviner began to replace his utensils, carefully and patiently. He had at least learned two virtues.

Nigel, gravelled, rode back into the town in an ill-humour and called for his breakfast. By the time that was finished the troopers were at the door.

There was no help but to go forward, and one may be assured that neither hill nor stream nor any wayside beauty of Bohemia could do aught to bring his mind back to a calm mood. He suspected the "Jew," as he called him. He suspected Gordon, and as for the phantasmagoria of last night, he could make nothing of it. His tendency was to disbelieve, only his respect for Wallen-

stein's powers of thought diminished his disbelief to something approaching mere doubt. The one thing that stood out was the vision of Ottilie von Thüringen.

Surely it was her "wraith." And if it had by chance been that of some familiar friend in Scotland, or of some one of his blood relations, he would have been awed, but he would have regarded it, in accord with tradition, as portending or announcing some stroke of fate.

He had been carried too much out of himself to hear what Wallenstein had muttered, to observe closely how that great one received the vision. This at least he had garnered, that Wallenstein also recognised her.

But who then was she? There was another feeling that sprang up in his heart, an uneasy half-born pang, which he dismissed only to find it knocking at the door again. The "wraith" of Ottilie had gazed at Wallenstein, not with eyes of speculation, as the playwright Shakespeare had it, but as one might gaze with open eyes in dream at some beloved object limned only in the brain behind.

But she had gazed at Wallenstein with a benignity which had softened the whole countenance, a benignity which he himself in his two days' contact with her had never surprised upon it. And this the geometrical hocus-pocus of the vile Jew had foreshadowed when he contrived that the right focus of her orbit should also be the centre of Wallenstein's. As Nigel had no knowledge of geometry, and regarded it as a cabalistic invention, though he had heard of telescopes, and of Columbus, and vessel charts, he esteemed this part of the diviner's doings as mere trickery, akin to the old devices of the magicians before Pharaoh. But by no explanation of mere artifice could he doubt that he saw the "wraith" of Ottilie, and that Wallenstein also saw. While recognising her as some one he knew, had Wallenstein thought of her in any

close relation to himself? His attitude of surprise said no. But was it possible that Wallenstein could forget so mysterious an occurrence, dismiss it as a mere dream?

Nigel had had five or six years of close companionship with men. There are men who, from their cradle to their grave, are attended and companioned by women, and shrink from the rough and, on the whole, kindly and bracing contact with their kind. Nigel had thrust himself into the world of man at the dawn of manhood, and in the fellowship of arms he had found as mixed a chance-medley as the world of men could show, free from the namby-panby of the courts, free from the court's petty chicane, free from the emulous avarice of the mart; not in some corners destitute of scholarship, though scholarship was rare; rejoicing in bodily strength and skill in arms, in hearty eating, in wine, and beer, and song, in which they honoured women much more than they ever did in such commerce of love or licence as the fortune of war or the conditions of the camp afforded.

From his study of manhood this Nigel had observed, that whereas among the younger men the talk of doings in the lists of love was as frequent as their flagons, it was almost entirely to seek among the older officers, as among the older soldiers, giving place to criticism of their professional doings, the appraising of the abilities of those more advanced in rank, to politics, to affairs more akin to those of that world without, that in some shape or form paid the reckoning.

He reasoned from the general to the particular, from those who had failed to become Wallensteins to him who had not failed. He was forty-eight, and if any man could find his interest in affairs of state or war that man was Wallenstein. But the diviner had declared that Wallenstein's future was bound up with a woman—had raised up, by what witchcraft or geometry Nigel could give no guess,

a vision of her with rapt eyes bent on Wallenstein. Was Wallenstein at forty-eight proof against the lure, proof against the charm of a majestic lovely woman, in whom was nothing of Circe, nothing of that Helen of Troy, whose face, so Kit Marlowe had phrased it, had

“ . . . launched a thousand ships,
And burned the topless towers of Ilium,”

yet whose bodily presence had left Nigel with a hunger of the heart and an unrest unaccustomed, as it was unsought, and unappeasable ?

He knew it when he saw the vision, and he feared lest Wallenstein should feel it, and, feeling it, stretch out his lion paw for the lioness Destiny had offered.

These thoughts occupied much of his time as he journeyed to Pilsen, and, with the exception that a well equipped and horsed light travelling carriage passed them on the road with curtains closely drawn, no traveller had passed or met them. But nearing Pilsen a pair of cavaliers on very excellent beasts overtook them, and, saluting Nigel, made as if they would fain keep him company. He could not profess to be travelling faster seeing they had overtaken him, and a look at their horses showed that they were better-bred animals and in better condition than his own. Their politeness was marked, and one of them appeared to be an Italian and one a Spaniard by his accent, though they addressed Nigel and his lieutenant in good German. This they presently confirmed, for the Italian gave his name as the Cavalier Marco Strozzi and introduced the other as Don Phillippo di Tortaugas. They were travelling to Vienna, and their valets were coming behind, having been outstripped by their masters, who were eager to reach that city.

Nigel was bound to reciprocate their confidences by giving his own and his companion's names

and conditions, mentioning that a military errand was taking him also to Vienna.

They were well-bred men and well travelled, for they spoke with assurance of many towns and cities and princes and gentlemen of repute of their acquaintance. They were curious to know of this Edict of Restitution, of which every one spoke, and displayed some measure of sympathy with the Emperor, who was the instrument of the Pope in the enforcing of it. In their countries they were thankful to say heresy was practically non-existent. In them the Church was powerful and paramount, and they had no doubt of the ultimate success of the Church in Germany.

They spoke of Wallenstein, of whom they had heard much, and asked Nigel if he thought Wallenstein was well affected towards the Edict. If so, why had he been requested by the Emperor to give up his command? Nigel cautiously answered that Wallenstein was before all things a professional soldier, and had laid down his baton when the Emperor had no more present need of him.

By the time they arrived at Pilsen the four gentlemen were on good terms and sat down together to the evening meal. The two cavaliers insisted on ordering the wine, whereof they themselves drank but sparingly, and made merry with numerous tales of Italy and Spain, so that Nigel and his lieutenant thought that they had never spent a more sociable evening. At length the two cavaliers professed themselves sleepy and called for candles, and Nigel and his comrade, not only professing, but most indubitably inclined the same way, also made for their night quarters.

Now it was Nigel's custom to have his saddle-bags and holsters brought to his own chamber, and this had been done. Sergeant Blick had always this service to do, and Nigel dismissed him to a final quart of beer, and was him-

self very soon asleep. In two hours he awoke,—a fact he set down to the account of the unusual quality of the wine he had taken, which was costly beyond his own purse limits, and some wines have the nature to be greatly soporific, yet the effect is of somewhat brief lasting.

He turned on his side, and, as he did so, he thought he heard the creaking of a leathern strap, for his saddle-bags and holsters were new and did not easily open. Then he took a deep audible breath and made as if he sank into sleep again. But his ears were fully alert, and he made sure that the noise was real. Very silently he turned again upon his right side, meaning to possess himself of his sword, which was always placed near his right hand, stretching out to take it. In an instant his hand was caught in a noose and fastened to the bedpost. Springing up to release it, his left ankle was seized and tied to another bedpost, and a very effective bandage pushed into his mouth. The rest of him was secured very quickly, and, as he could not cry out, he had the felicity of knowing that his possessions were being thoroughly ransacked by the two marauders, whoever they were.

Not a word was said. The room was in pitch darkness, and presently the thieves stole away. For long he could not release himself by as much as a single knot, but by infinite workings of his neck and chin and ankles and wrists, till all were sore alike, he wore some fastening loose. And just as he had attacked the last one, which bound his left leg, he heard the sound of horses below in the courtyard, and presently the great gates closed with a clang, and the hoofs of four horses sounded on the cobblestones of the street.

He struck a light. All that he carried was on the floor, and saddle-bags and holsters were empty. Nothing had been taken. His money, his clothes, his weapons were all there. It had not then been for these.

It was a search for something, and that something was the despatches. And these had been already stolen. It was evident that the first plotters and the second were of diverse parties. The first might conceivably be men who served the Protestant cause; but who were the second? It was to the interest of the Protestant cause that their leaders throughout Germany should know what forces they had to meet, what Tilly was going to do next. But of whom else?

CHAPTER X.

FATHER LAMORMAIN.

FERDINAND of Habsburg, King of Austria by heirship, King of Hungary by default of a better, rather than by force of arms, was in the ears of the world Emperor of Rome. Considering that he neither owned nor governed a rood of land south of the Po, that the title signified the headship of the German-speaking states, and that he had been elected to the high office by his fellow princes, who were each and all supreme and independent rulers over their own territories, and each and all eligible for the same high office, the name seems something misplaced; but it is not convenient to enter here into a historical dissertation showing how it came to be so.

Several generations of Habsburgs in turn had been elected Emperor, and doubtless there was good enough reason. It was perhaps more easy not to be jealous of a family which had borne the office for a century or two, than of a new one, however deserving in other respects. And there was this in addition, that Austria and Hungary were the outer wall of all the German-speaking states against the Turk, and must in any case bear the first brunt of his activities. In that connection too, whatever dissensions might be rife, and there were always dissensions between German-speaking states, it is evident that

there must be some organisation approaching to a mutual league against the Turk. Christians have always possessed the privilege of and the instinct for fighting amongst themselves, but a Christian, however black in his theology, is still fairer than an infidel, and the infidels for very shame had to be kept out of Christian German states at all costs. For one thing, they would have ruined the trade in spices.

So, as the Emperor resided at Vienna, he was very sure to exercise his authority and demand aids for his own army from the others in sufficient time to present a stout front to the Ottoman power, though on more than one occasion he was rather late in doing so. But if the Emperor, who alone could call out the quotas of men from all the states, had happened to have lived, say, at Mainz, half of the German lands might have been overrun before his army was collected. So on the whole the Habsburgs, having begun to perform and got used to the exalted functions of the Emperor of Rome, might, so the Electoral Princes seemed to think at election after election, just as well continue to exercise them, and to be the outer wall against the Paynim hosts.

Ferdinand was a good son of Rome. Brought up at the Jesuit seminary of Ingolstadt he had grown up strong in the faith, and had wasted no time, on coming to man's estate and the enjoyment of dominion as an elector, in purging his chief town of Gratz, and all the Habsburger land committed to his charge, of all pastors, Lutheran or Calvinist. He went to the root of the matter, and in all things deferred to his advisers, the Jesuits, who went further than the root, and to Maximilian of Bavaria, who had also imbibed the milk of the learning of Ingolstadt, and was if anything of a deeper shade of Jesuitry, if that were possible, than the Jesuits.

But as Ferdinand was a good son of Rome, that meant

in his case son of the General of the Jesuits, the mysterious personality that even the Holy Father might bless or ban as he would, but never reduce to that exact degree of submission to his authority which is implied in any rank of the hierarchy below that of Pontiff.

Like a good father, the General of the Jesuits had no notion of allowing so intelligent and obedient a son to run wild after his own conceits. So he had wisely installed at the Court of Vienna Father Lamormain, one of the order, to keep a watchful eye upon the steps of Ferdinand.

Father Lamormain had that perfect confidence in Ferdinand which is built upon a perfect understanding of character, with this reservation, that he preferred to know everything that had happened at least a little while, even if it were but a day, an hour, or even less, before his august pupil, so that whereas the Emperor came to the subject ready to be actuated by surprise, alarm, soreness, vindictiveness, or any other human quality, Father Lamormain, who, if he ever felt these undesirable emotions, had got over them, and already bent his brilliant intellect to what was at issue, could at once gently and firmly insinuate a counsel carefully considered, a counsel which Ferdinand would presently make his own.

Father Lamormain had as usual heard the Emperor's confession and retired to his own suite of apartments. There he found awaiting him two brethren of the order, who asked and received his blessing. Their manners were as fine as Father Lamormain's. They exhibited just the shade of deference due from a gentleman, who is an officer, to another gentleman who is his superior officer.

The reverend Father and his visitors sat down. He did not toy with his correspondence, or his plans, or any other object. He sat reposeful in his chair and embraced both his guests at the same time in his pleasant smile, and his changes of bodily attitude were slight.

"And you say he is really on his way?"

"He cannot be many leagues away now!" said one.

"And his name is Nigel Charteris?" In his mouth it sounded like "Chartaire."

"A Catholic family of the south of Scotland!"

"Like this?" asking Father Lamormain, writing the name on his tablets and erasing it.

"Yes!"

"Ah! Very interesting! He is not a recent convert?"

"No, Father!" said the other one, catching his eye and smiling. "It is a pity even to seem to discourage a loyal son in the faith!" His tone conveyed a real regret.

"You were obliged to resort to some slight measure of force? I trust it was slight?"

The two exchanged glances and smiled in their fine ingenious way, showing their beautiful teeth.

"We did nothing to disable him or to deface his coinage!" said the first.

"But we certainly had to use effectual force!" said the other.

"He is a gentleman, handsome, and of good manners?"

"He is all three! And a veritable Scot for caution! And for a soldier quite free from the prevailing laxities."

"You make me quite solicitous to see him! And you found nothing?"

"Absolutely nothing! A few purely private papers, but no despatches!"

"It is curious all the same that Count Tilly should send merely verbal messages by the mouth of a captain of musketeers to the Emperor."

"It is not likely that he had entrusted the writings to any of his troopers!" said one of the visitors.

Father Lamormain thanked them for their good intentions and the pains they had been at, then dismissed

them. There was no suggestion of blame for failure. Infinite patience was the rule and practice of the order,—infinite polishing of weapons. Subordinates are not polished by rancour. Blame roughens the edge of service more often than it sharpens. The Society of Jesuits, founded by an enthusiast who was almost a fanatic, eschewed fanaticism, and provided channels for its enthusiasm of such fine workmanship as ensured that that precious fluid should reach the precise spot that was to be watered. The best that could be found in birth, the best that could be nurtured of scholarship, the best exponents of the social arts that make men charming companions for their fellows, were enrolled in the ranks after years of youthful training. Implicit faith in their leaders, implicit obedience, became not so much a part of the rule of the order as a habit of the mind. No task was too rough or too delicate but that the order could somewhere place its finger on the man to execute it. And straightway he would rise and set about it. Truly the Society of Jesus was an inspired engine which possessed powers far exceeding the knowledge of its founder and inventor.

Being by himself, the Jesuit drew from a drawer a sheet of parchment which had evidently been folded and sealed. It was in cipher, but it may be held as certain that Father Lamormain possessed the keys of all the ciphers in use among the politicians of Europe; and this was of no surprising intricacy. His secretary had unravelled it in a few minutes. He rang for him. He was a man of middle age, having the look of a recluse and a priest rather than a man of affairs.

"This purports to be a copy of Count Tilly's despatch which the Emperor expects?"

"Yes, Father, or rather a short summary of it. It gives you, as you see, the numbers of all his troops and

the disposition of them; indications of his next movements, and some other details."

"And it accords nearly with what we know from our own sources?"

"Yes, Father!"

"It was taken from a messenger who left Eger for the north?"

"Yes, Father! The messenger was unfortunately killed!"

Father Lamormain's lips moved in silence. He was offering up a prayer for this poor adversary's soul, for this poor fellow who had come unwittingly into contact with the engine invented by Ignatius Loyola, and been broken.

"It might have been a false document intended to deceive Gustavus and the Protestants," said the Father again meditatively. Then he placed the parchment on one side as if for further perusal and proceeded to read over and sign a number of letters his secretary had brought him.

The secretary having gathered up the papers, said—

"You were to have audience of the Archduchess Stephanie this morning!"

"Oh yes! I remember! The time is nearly due. See that no one enters in the interim."

Even as he spoke a servant called the secretary and he returned presently, ushering in with profound bows the Archduchess.

Father Lamormain had again spread out the supposed summary of Tilly's despatch before him in a good light. There was nothing else on his table but the inkstand to distract attention.

The Archduchess, who was young and tall and slender with wonderful dark eyes, knelt and kissed the holy father's hand.

As a good Catholic she was bound to reverence her father's confessor.

But Father Lamormain stood for more than that. He had held the same position when she was a mere poppet, marching about with an endless company of *gouvernantes* and ladies, in an absurd stiff brocade dress, which trailed on the ground just as theirs did, and her little neck surrounded by a ruff, a sweet monstrous epitome of queendom. There had been court functionaries in plenty, great officers of state then as now. But it was Father Lamormain who reigned supreme as the confidential counsellor of the family in all that pertained to the welfare of the house of Habsburg; so that every member of the family of the Emperor understood that Father Lamormain was a benevolent despot, who had always smoothed over all kinds of family troubles. Dimly too they understood that the Emperor himself, though a man by no means deficient in any particular quality of kingship, respected the Jesuit's advice on matters of state.

The Archduchess seated herself. The secretary had withdrawn.

"I should have craved audience of your Highness in your own apartments," said Father Lamormain with great gentleness, "but what I had to say was for your own ears, and I wished not to excite curiosity nor to gratify it."

The Archduchess inclined her head, and with just a perceptible pause said, "Your secretary?"

For answer Father Lamormain rose, opened the door by which she had entered, a thick door, over which fell a heavy curtain of leather, and pointed to a farther door, ten feet along the passage, beyond which was the room where the secretary worked.

She saw that they were indeed cut off from human

earshot, for the room, in which they were, projected, at a considerable height, beyond the walls of the main building, and had nothing to right or left.

Her eyes seemed to sweep casually over the table and incidentally over the unsealed parchment, but with indifference. "Was that to be the subject of the interview?" she asked herself.

Apparently not.

"It behoves princes," said the priest, "to strengthen their families as well by alliances as by leagues and treaties, and especially by the marriages of their sons and daughters. And whereas the son of a prince, if he be a good son, will always be a stay and support to his father's kingdom, whomsoever he marry, a daughter may, by bringing him a stout son-in-law, who is also a prince, in a measure add that principedom and its power to her father's. Contrariwise she may, if she be ill-advised or rash in her own choice, out of waywardness bring trouble to the prince her father, and no measure of help to her husband, as was the case of the Princess Elizabeth of England when she married the Elector Palatine, the Pfalsgrave, whose dominion being but petty led him into dangerous enterprises to gain others, and being too far distant from his father-in-law, the King of England, was not afforded sufficient aid in the time of his undertakings to ensure success."

"A very wise homily, Father, and a most pertinent example!" the Archduchess observed. "And now the application?"

"Your Highness is of a ripe age for marriage!" said the priest gravely.

"And has been," she rejoined, "these several years, according to the custom of princes. My cousin of Spain was but sixteen when the King of England was agog for her to wed his son, who is now King Charles, and

it was through no unwillingness of hers that the match fell through. But I have had the more years of freedom. I am in no mind to be tied to any beardless boy, and sit a-tapestry-sewing for the rest of my life."

The priest pursued his way without comment.

"The dangers that environ the empire make it necessary beyond the ordinary to knit our friends to it by every means in our power."

"The dangers would melt like the morning mist if the Emperor recalled Albrecht von Walstein," she said with great decision.

"It is for the Emperor to choose his captains," the priest rejoined gently. "He is a possible servant, not a friend of the Emperor. When I say 'knit our friends together,' I mean the princes, who are our peers in blood and of our faith."

The Archduchess was for a moment puzzled.

"Is it of France or Spain you speak, Father?" She said it wonderingly, because she knew of no princes of or nearly her own age in either kingdom.

"Of neither, your Highness, but of those houses that are equal with your own in the right to be elected to the empire."

"There are six electors! There are three archbishops—Mainz, Köln, Trier—two are Protestants, the Palatine, the Saxon, . . . you cannot mean the Wittlesbacher!" The disgust that she felt showed itself unmistakably.

"Who is a greater friend to the Habsburgs than Maximilian of Bavaria?" Father Lamormain dwelt almost affectionately on the syllables.

"Or a greater friend to your order?" the Archduchess asked.

This was a sharp thrust, and showed that the lady was well aware of the terms on which Maximilian and the Jesuits stood.

Father Lamormain made a little gentle deprecating shrug.

"Let me remind your Highness that, at the last election of the Roman Emperor, Maximilian held the election in his hand, but he exercised his own vote in favour of your father. Was this not proving himself a friend to whom any gratitude is due? And this was not the last or greatest of his services."

"Indeed?" said the Archduchess. "What were the other services?"

"Did he not defeat, nay crush, the Palatine on the white hills of Prague?"

"It was the work of General Pappenheim, was it not?"

"The merit was his! Again I say, Pappenheim was merely his captain. The Elector Maximilian found men and money for the campaign,—money which the Emperor owes him to this day."

"It has been sufficiently bruited about," the Archduchess commented. "There is something of the Jew about your Maximilian."

"He is a most noble worthy prince," said Father Lamormain, "and he is a widower!"

"It is time he was done with wiving. He must be sixty years old." She gave a little shiver of disgust.

"He is not so old as you think, your Highness, neither is his vigour of mind and body much abated, but it is not becoming of me to discourse of these things to your Highness. The Elector Maximilian desires to wed again, and to one of the Emperor's daughters. . . ."

"And you wish me, the Archduchess Stephanie of Austria, to listen to a proposal of marriage with Maximilian of Bavaria, whose grandson were a more fitting match. Understand! I cannot and I will not. The Emperor may assert his will, if he has any, apart from your order. But as for me I will go into a nunnery, or marry a private gentleman, or turn Protestant."

"As to the first," said the priest, "you would thereby run the risk of losing your soul instead of saving it, for you would be doing it out of frowardness. As for the second, your pride would never brook the extinction that would follow it. *As for the third, your Highness, it is mooted that you have already strange leanings towards heretics if not heresy.*"

The Archduchess flushed angrily. Her eyes flashed. Her whole face and form, as she rose to her feet, took on an aspect of terrible majesty.

"Enough, Father Lamormain! You trespass beyond your proper functions!"

"No!" said the priest humbly enough. "Your soul is dearer to me than my own. I can only pray that you do not jeopardise it."

As if unconsciously his eyes fell from her own, which he had met with calm benignity, to the papers on the table, and then he suddenly lifted them and met her glance again. Again came the rush of crimson to her cheeks, then pallor.

She turned, and, sweeping aside the leathern curtain, passed out of the chamber.

CHAPTER XI.

THE LOST DESPATCHES FOUND.

It was evening when Nigel at length passed with his escort through the gates of Vienna, and on arriving at the palace was received with abundance of courtesies by some officer of the household, who ushered him to a suite of apartments in the wing allotted to the gentlemen in attendance on his Imperial Majesty. The Emperor was at dinner, and would expect him at his audience at an early hour on the morrow. A sumptuous supper was set before him, and he was assiduously waited on by two pages. Dinner ended, the same officer appeared again, and asked if he desired to deliver his despatches to the Emperor's secretaries, who would wait upon him, but Nigel made excuse that his commission was to deliver them to the Emperor. This answer the gentleman received civilly enough, and saying he would send some officers to bear him company, wished him a good night's rest after his journey,

Presently three gentlemen came in and joined him at the table, where, the remains of supper being cleared away and fresh wine set down, they sat and played Skat, a game of cards which was then in great vogue among all the people of the eastern part of Germany, and had wiled away the tedium of many a long evening in camp for

Nigel. With this and talk of Magdeburg a couple of hours passed pleasantly, and then the party broke up. Nigel was not sorry to be free to go to bed.

It was a room of comfortable aspect. The walls were hung with embossed leather in the Flemish manner; the bed was a wide and high four-poster, and the other furniture consisted of a great chest, a chair or two and some other necessities. It looked out upon the courtyard of the palace, a large open space surrounded on four sides by piles of building. Nigel could dimly see so much. The rest he left till morning.

Having performed his devotions he stretched himself out upon the bed, drew up the heavy quilted counterpane and prepared to sleep.

But sleep was not to be wooed easily; for what was to happen on the morrow he could not foresee. The profound humiliation of having to confess in open audience to the Emperor the loss of his despatches was perhaps the most poignant of his anticipations. And this he had passed through so often in his mind already that he could not imagine that any worse pang than he had already experienced could arise out of the reality. From this his mind roved to the punishment that might be inflicted. He expected that some military penalty would be his lot, confinement perhaps for a time, the loss of his rank as captain. The worst would be dismissal from the Emperor's service; for like a true Scot he had learned to love his profession, and the service he had chosen had become that which commanded all his loyalty. As a soldier of fortune, who had fought with Wallenstein, he could make his way in any of the armies of Europe, but he was not by nature a mercenary. Dismissal would be the heaviest punishment of all. And then his thoughts, tired of dwelling on these painful themes, flew away to Erfurt and to Ottilie von Thüringen, that mysterious high-born lady

whose history was entwined with his own and Wallenstein's.

He had laughed scornfully as he rode to Vienna, thinking of the poor figure Pietro Bramante had cut on the roadside among his pots and phials, wondered how Wallenstein could ever have paid the attention to his hocus-pocus that he had. He had blamed himself for his credulity when the sunlight and the matter-of-fact incidents of his journey had made the doings at Eger seem unreal.

But Ottilie was real. Ottilie had left an abiding impression. For Ottilie Nigel felt he could abandon even the service of the Emperor. Could he but gain one look of rapt intentness, such as the vision of her had cast upon Wallenstein, then all the world might go. The surprising softness of her cheek, the great dark liquid eyes laden with mist or charged with lightning, the rich tones of her proud voice,—he recalled them and dwelt upon them one by one, and his whole being was full of the delight of his contemplation. And then, bathed in a warm glow, he fell asleep.

In the morning he was awakened by Sergeant Blick bringing him his holiday suit, or court suit, if it could be called so, for one who had never been at court before, with its freshly laundered lace collar and cuffs, its handsome doublet and breeches of dark-blue and silver, its fine Spanish leathern boots with tiny gold spurs, its plumed hat to carry out the vain conceit of one having come off a journey. Beneath the collar he wore a silver gorget and his sword, with its silver-tipped sheath burnished to the utmost, hung at his side.

Sergeant Blick was determined that, as far as in him lay, his own captain of musketeers should make a comely gallant show before the Emperor. He stayed till the last strap was secure and in its place.

"Now, captain, you look brave enough as far as outward fripperies go. But the devil snatch me, captain, bear yourself less like a man that is going to be hung. A little smack of the Italian would not be amiss. It must not be said that Tilly's men cannot prank it with these Austrian rascals."

Then he stood back to see the effect, and even Nigel, whose anticipations of evil had again possessed him but a whit less than they had the night before, was forced to laugh.

"You're like an old hen with one chicken, Blick. Call for a pint of Tokay and you shall see how I will outdo Captain Bobadillo!"

A brace of pages and a servant appeared at the same time.

The servant led away Sergeant Blick, not unwilling, to the buttery.

The pages conducted Nigel to his *salle à manger*, and furnished not only the needful flagon of Tokay, but a substantial breakfast of smoked ham and sausages, a cold capon and dried fish. By the time he had finished he would have faced the Emperor and the whole Reichstag to boot.

Then the pages brought him scented water and soft linen to remove the traces of breakfast, and asked if he were ready.

They led him down the stairs, across the courtyard, in which the guard of the palace were exercising, and Nigel's eyes roved over their headpieces and corslets and muskets with the approval an officer must always bestow on a well-accoutred and disciplined troop. The pages crossed the courtyard and entered another door, again leading to some stairs, and pushing open two high doors, they led him into another long gallery, the walls of which were hung with many portraits of bygone Habsburgs and of

many grand dukes and princes with whom they had contracted alliances.

He cast a glance here and there, asking the pages questions as he went. They told him that the hall of audience was at the other end, and that he would be summoned presently. There being no need of haste, he sauntered, giving more heed and indeed coming to a stand before a newly painted canvas of a princess.

"The Archduchess Stephanie!" exclaimed both pages.

Nigel stood gazing at it.

"By Signor Pourbus, a Spaniard, who has but just painted the Emperor!" they went on.

"Wondrous like!" was Nigel's exclamation.

"Very like!" said the pages. "Here comes Her Highness. She walks here a little while most mornings."

And out of a chamber at the side the Archduchess Stephanie came, and Nigel and the pages awaited her approach. She came with no hurried pace, and as she came Nigel grew pale and red by turns, for here, if any one, was Ottilie von Thüringen, gloriously apparelled, her hair framing her face in a multitude of curling locks of raven hues, rows of pearls about her neck, suspending against the whiteness of her throat a jewelled dragon.

The Archduchess stayed in her walk, and having cast a look at Nigel, said gently to one of the pages—

"Hermann! Who is this gentleman who waits for audience?"

"If it please your Highness," said the page, "it is Captain Nigel Charteris, bearer of despatches from Magdeburg!"

"Ah! I had forgotten." Then she turned to Nigel, who dropped upon his knees, extending him her hand to kiss, and he accomplished the obeisance with good grace, notwithstanding his lively emotion.

"You are welcome to Vienna, sir!"

Nigel was now uncertain. The tones of her voice seemed familiar, but not convincing.

"You have doubtless had a troublous journey?"

"In some measure, your Highness!" He had gained courage to look straight into her eyes, but there was no look or sign of recognition.

She made a little gesture to the page, who withdrew to wait at the end of the gallery.

"Tell me, sir, did you pass through Eger on your way?"

"Yes, your Highness!"

"Count Albrecht von Waldstein, is he not there?"

"Yes, your Highness!"

"Did you see him?"

"I did, your Highness! He is my old commander. He wearies for a renewal of his service!"

"Ah!" It was almost a sigh. "It will come again. It was but yesterday I had a message from him asking me to use my offices with the Emperor. He spoke of you and sent me a packet to give you."

There was a cabinet much inlaid with ivory, from Milan, as the pages had told him, which stood near by, and the Archduchess brought a little key from her chatelaine wallet and opened it, as if to show him the curious work within.

In one of the drawers which she pulled out was a leathern wallet. Nigel's eye fastened greedily upon it. For it was the wallet in which he had carried the despatches.

"It looks," said Nigel, "as if it and I, your Highness, were old acquaintances thrust apart by circumstance. May I look within?"

The Archduchess said, without any sign of interest, "It is for you, sir; open it."

Inside was the precious packet. Nigel could not re-

strain his eyes from glowing, his face from flushing, or his fingers from a little tremor. He turned it round. It was intact as he had lost it. The seal of Count Tilly was perfect.

"Your Highness is surely my good angel," he said gratefully, forgetting for the moment the old Ottilie von Thüringen in the new and glorious Archduchess Stephanie. "This that Wallenstein has sent me will justify my coming hither. Without it I had been dubbed, and rightly, a blundering knave, for your Highness should know I was robbed of it in a forest while I slept, and with two sentries on guard."

"It was a fault Albrecht von Waldstein would have borne hardly, had he been Captain-General. But in this case Fortune has been kind to you."

Nigel bowed. "I would that your Highness would continue to represent the Goddess in my regard."

She said nothing but some word of adieu, and passed on her way solitary, gliding like a swan.

And before Nigel could form any opinion on this strange rencontre with the proud princess, one of the gentlemen-in-waiting came and begged his attendance in the audience-chamber.

CHAPTER XII.

NIGEL MEETS FATHER LAMORMAIN.

As Nigel passed out of the gallery and crossed the landing at the top of another staircase, a door to the left of him opened from another gallery at right angles to the one he had just left, and two Jesuit priests came out in the dress of their order, shaven and tonsured. He saluted, and they acknowledged his salutation with a brief benediction in the Latin tongue and passed on. The eyes of both seemed familiar to him, though for the moment, being bent upon his errand, he could not have told why.

The doors of the audience-chamber opened, and an officer of the household announced in a loud voice—

“Sire! The noble and high-born Captain Nigel Charteris with despatches from Tilly, Count of Tzerclaës!”

Nigel advanced, preceded by the gentleman-in-waiting, bowed three times as he did so, following the example set him, and presently stood at the Emperor's left hand, where stood the principal secretary, who received the despatches, and, having glanced at the seal, handed it to the Emperor, who, giving it to the Chancellor of the Empire, at his right hand, commanded him to break the seals.

The Emperor had acknowledged Nigel's presence at the side of his secretary with a slight but perceptible move-

ment of the eyes, which rested upon him for a few seconds, and of the head, and then relapsed into an austere aloofness. Nigel, standing alert and ready for further business, if it should concern him, observed that Ferdinand was a man to all appearance of some fifty odd years, lean, of yellowish complexion, with eyes of a bluish tinge, dark-brown hair, a moustache twisted fiercely upwards, a short pointed beard with strands of grey in it, and dark scanty eyebrows. He wore a large stiff ruff about his neck. His doublet was of dark Genoese velvet, and a single gold chain suspended a medallion or badge of some order of knighthood. He sat in an easy attitude, attentive, but as a man wearied of affairs, yet of that fixity of will that lets nothing go by him that he should set his hand to. The long, slightly aquiline nose, fleshy towards the point, together with the projecting tufted lower lip, proclaimed him Habsburg. His chair was raised upon a dais, so that he sat on a higher level by some inches than the great officers of the council who sat at the table.

Nigel could not help noticing the slenderness of his hands and the length of the tapering fingers, which were beyond the common measure of men's hands, and reminded him of the hands of Otilie von Thüringen.

From the Emperor his gaze fell upon a familiar figure that of a man who sat back from the table, as if to give more play to his long legs, and at the Emperor's right hand.

It needed but a glance at the face, ennobled by its fine expanse of forehead from which the hair had receded, and the flowing black locks, still making a brave show of plenty, which fell to his deep lace collar, to recognise Maximilian of Bavaria. The fine delicate dark brows, the large humorous dark eyes, the aquiline nose, the pointed chin decked with a pointed and unmistakably grey beard, the short upper lip with a soft flowing

moustache, composed a face easy to remember, and somewhat suggestive of a life spent in thought and deep designs rather than in the field, where, however, he had borne no mean nor infrequent burden.

The Chancellor proceeded to read Count Tilly's despatch, which set forth with a brevity worthy of his reputation as a general the final operations before Magdeburg, the taking of the city, the number of men killed and wounded on both sides. Count Tilly here strongly commended the Bavarian General Papenheim, who had rendered very notable assistance in the siege and storm. Then followed the roster of the army as it was on the morning of Nigel's departure, and an intimation that it was not possible to quarter the troops in the town itself on account of the destruction of the houses, and of the fear of pestilence. Pending further instructions, Count Tilly intimated that he should form a fortified camp not far from the city, making such excursions into the neighbouring country as might be necessary to continue the enforcement of the Edict, or to oppose the operations of Gustavus. In the event of the Electors of Saxony and Brandenburg, or either of them, declaring openly for Gustavus, he proposed to enter Saxony and endeavour to bring the Elector to submission.

The Emperor questioned Nigel as to the extent of the destruction of Magdeburg and the cause of it; and Nigel gave such answer as he was able, saying that, no quarter being given on either side, the entrance into the city was the cause of much bloodshed, owing to the tenacity of the burghers, many of whom set fire to their houses to entrap the soldiery and frustrate the sacking.

"You passed through Erfurt, Plauen, and Eger?" the Emperor asked. "How was the Edict being received?"

"Erfurt and Eger, sire, are mainly of the Catholic faith,

and have strong garrisons. Plauen would willingly have hung me and my escort, incited to rebellion by the news from Magdeburg!"

"But you escaped hanging, Captain?" the Emperor asked without a smile.

"I took the burghers unawares, and escaped by night!" said Nigel.

"You have our thanks, Captain! You will remain at Vienna some days till our plans are made, when you will receive our further orders. We shall recommend Count Tilly to advance you in rank for your services."

Nigel murmured a few words of thanks, and again bowing three times as he retreated, found himself outside the audience-chamber in company with the friendly gentleman-in-waiting who had ushered him in, very well pleased to have had such a favourable interview, and, where he had expected so lately as that very morning at least disgrace, to have received the promise of promotion, than which nothing could be more grateful to his ambition as a soldier.

The more he thought of the miraculous recovery of his wallet the less could he understand it. It must have been brought to Wallenstein by some emissary who had intercepted the robber. Or was it the man on the sorrel horse, that man of pots and phials and orbits and horoscopes, after all? Had he sought to propitiate Wallenstein, and had Wallenstein, recognising his duty to the Emperor, taken this circuitous way of returning it to the messenger, knowing full well what penalty he might otherwise expect? Yes! That was the solution without doubt. His old admiration of Wallenstein as a commander was now strengthened by gratitude towards him as a man.

And the Archduchess? Pietro Bramante's conjuration was, if as inexplicable as ever, of the Archduchess.

Hence Wallenstein's exclamation, which he had only faintly heard in the midst of his own excitement. Some curious resemblance, no doubt, there must have been between the unknown Otilie and the Archduchess, but the method of sending the wallet proved that Wallenstein accepted the prediction in the faith that it was the Archduchess Stephanie, who on her part had at least fulfilled the commission with a tact and secrecy that spoke of a willingness to respond to the wish of the sender.

He had, whilst working out this satisfactory conclusion, accompanied the gentleman aforesaid to the gardens of the palace, where, said his guide, he would probably find sufficient to amuse him for an hour or so, when he could easily find his way back to his quarters, and further arrangements would be made to entertain him.

There was a profusion of statuary. There were peacocks. There were flowers arranged in precise beds, and short clipped hedges of green shrubs in the Italian fashion. The morning was sunny, and in his elation he found everything exceeding well. It was a golden day. He sauntered here and there.

And so by the merest chance did Father Lamormain, that peaceful refined priest, in a cassock which did credit to the tailor who fashioned it, though it was cut strictly according to the rule of the Jesuits.

Nigel had never set eyes on Father Lamormain, and, if he had heard of him, it was in the vague way in which people of middle station hear the name of the king's physician, or of the king's barber, and forget it. Father Lamormain had not been at the audience. His duty was best done in the Emperor's private apartment, or in his own, to which even the Emperor repaired on occasions. But Father Lamormain knew quite well what had taken place, all that the Chancellor had read aloud and as much

of it as the Chancellor had kept to himself. For Father Lamormain was not for nothing the most trusted Jesuit in the country east of the Rhine.

At first Nigel passed the priest, who was to all appearance a Jesuit, with a bow. The priest desisted from telling his beads and bowed also. In their saunter they bowed again, and the priest very gently expressed a hope that Nigel was "enjoying the beauty of the morning."

"Father," said Nigel, "it is indeed a fair morning, but good news makes the worst of mornings joyous!"

"Ah, youth! Ah, youth, the beautiful!" said the Father. "Youth is the season when one has good news! In after years the news never seems wholly good. There is always some little drawback."

Nigel inclined his head deferentially. Middle-aged men always spoke in this way. They were jealous of youth. But being in great spirits he thought to humour the priest, and said—

"There speaks a wide experience and a wide knowledge!"

"Surely," said the priest, "you are of the Scottish nation, and a soldier! Am I right, sir?"

"What makes you think so?" said Nigel, much amused.

"In the first place, the Scottish gentlemen are amongst the most courteous of men, and pronounce German very well; and as to the second, one could not miss that you were a soldier by your bearing."

There being at least two compliments wrapped up along with a commonplace, Nigel took another look at the priest and saw that the priest was a man of benign countenance, very courtly, and that his face was lined with many fine lines about the brow and eyes, which themselves were very penetrating. Nigel reflected on the Latin poet who feared Greeks and people bringing gifts. So he asked—

"Is there a college of your order in Vienna?"

"What makes you think so, sir? Does one swallow make a summer?"

"Would not three in succession lead one to imagine it was near?" Nigel asked again.

"See how the Scotsman answers a question by asking another!" the priest observed with a smile, which was very becoming to his countenance.

"Is that the way of my nation?" Nigel asked.

"In the parts about Haddington!" the priest replied very gently, and Nigel was very much perplexed at the reply. "But did you say just now that you had seen three swallows, or was it three brethren of my order, this morning?"

"I met two on the staircase of the palace this morning, and you are the third!" said Nigel.

"It will have been Father George and Father John. There is a small hostel of our order in Vienna."

"They resembled two gentlemen I met a few days back, two cavaliers!"

"Ah?" said the priest, inviting confidence.

"But *they* were cavaliers!" said Nigel. "So there was nothing in the resemblance. There seem a good many people in the world who resemble one another!" he added.

Father Lamormain was a little disappointed in this exuberant young officer, who went off into mere platitudes. But there was an element of persistence in his nature.

"You have doubtless come some distance to Vienna?" he went on. "I inferred from what you said just now that you had business in the palace, and I happened to notice that one of the Emperor's gentlemen brought you hither; and I know, I think I may say, all the people who dwell therein." He indicated the palace with his

hand. "So I judged you to be a stranger. Did you have a peaceful journey?"

"On the whole it was so!" said the Scot.

"You had peradventure an encounter with robbers?"

"If it could be called so, an encounter! Two men set upon me in the dark as I slept, and having bound and gagged me, ransacked my holsters, my saddle-bags, my clothes, and went away having taken nothing."

"And did you not see their faces, hear their voices?"

"Neither sight nor sound!"

"And you accomplished your errand successfully?"

"Quite, Father!"

"You were either very astute or very fortunate! You will doubtless be employed again. Now let me introduce myself. I am Father Lamormain, the Emperor's confessor."

"I am much honoured by your company," said Nigel.

"My name is Nigel Charteris, Captain of Musketeers."

"From Magdeburg, is it not?" The priest smiled.

CHAPTER XIII.

A FATHER, A CONFESSOR, AND A DAUGHTER.

THE Emperor Ferdinand and Father Lamormain were together in the Emperor's private apartments.

"She was always Stephanie the intractable!" said the Emperor, with something like a smile on his grave face. After all he had many memories of her that Father Lamormain could never have of any child.

"Yes!" said Father Lamormain. "But in this case your Imperial Majesty should permit itself to use its parental authority."

"Even to harshness?"

"Even to harshness!" said the priest in a gentle voice. "Your Majesty knows that the Elector Maximilian still claims that the Empire owes him thirteen millions of crowns for his aid in the war against the Elector Palatine, and that he wanted the Palatinate, and would have had it but for the opposition of Brandenburg and Saxony. Now if Brandenburg and Saxony join Gustavus, as they must, what can we say to Maximilian if he prefers his claim again?"

"He must have it, I suppose!" said the Emperor in a tone that suggested that he was rather tired.

"Then he will ask for Bohemia as the price for allowing his army to support Tilly against Gustavus."

"Bohemia is another affair!" said the Emperor more briskly.

"Now if her Highness the Archduchess would only consent to marry the Elector Maximilian, we should hear nothing more of the thirteen millions, or of the Palatinate, or of Bohemia," reflected Father Lamormain aloud.

"She is very young!" objected his Majesty.

"Not too young for mischief, sire."

"What new freak have you discovered, Father?"

"This!" said the Father, producing the letter he had had before him on the previous day. "It is a summary of the roll of Tilly's army, and it was found upon a messenger, who was unfortunately killed on his way to the north *before he could be questioned.*"

"But what has this to do with the Archduchess Stephanie?"

"It is marvellously like her handwriting! It is in cipher, of course; but look for yourself, sire."

The Emperor looked at it.

"It appears to be a woman's, and it is a most unclerkly scrawl. I should hesitate to attribute it to Stephanie! And, if it were hers, what possible object could she have in obtaining it, and how could she have obtained it?"

"It was in my hands, your Majesty, before the despatches arrived."

"But the seal on the despatches was intact. It was Count Tilly's seal. The Chancellor was satisfied?"

"Yes, sire!" The tone signified that Chancellors as a rule were easily satisfied.

"Come, Father, do you seriously suggest that the officer who brought it allowed the despatches to leave his hands?"

Father Lamormain had every cause to suppose so, but was unable for reasons of his own to state so.

"I merely infer from this cipher!"

"But it was not impossible that the roll of Tilly's army should be known to others, within a little!"

"Your Majesty's remark would be just if the messenger had been intercepted riding from Magdeburg. But from Eger, by which the officer passed? What then?"

"That would be to doubt the officer's fidelity. To begin with, he is a Scottish gentleman! He is of our faith! He is selected by Tilly, who has a good eye for a man."

"Then your Majesty does not wish the matter pursued in that direction." Father Lamormain was quite pleasant about it. He went on—

"I may say that I had a little talk with this young officer this morning in the gardens, and he appears to be a gentleman of good breeding, and of an ancient family, very well mannered, and wary withal. Your Majesty would be the better judge how far he is to be trusted if he were bidden to your reception after supper to-night. For the orders your Majesty will send to Tilly will be still more secret!" The Father seemed full of the most paternal feelings towards this young man, at the same time very desirous that the young man should not prove a prodigal son.

"As to the Archduchess Stephanie," said the Emperor, "I will speak to her on the subject of Maximilian. It is an ill time to consider marriages when there is so much at stake, but our faithful Elector can scarcely be bidden to wait *at his age*!" The Emperor had then a dry kind of humour. "You may send for her, Father, on my behalf!"

Father Lamormain pocketed his letter and retired. In a short time the Archduchess made her entry into her father's presence.

Her face wore the softness that is the outcome of an

affectionate nature. The fine meshes of the veil of rank that fell between her and the rest of the world, obscuring the expression, were absent.

Ferdinand's eye swept over her tall gracious form as she approached, and as she bent her knee to kiss his hand. He approved, but it made no difference. He was not a prince to be swayed by womanly beauty. Some princes have spent their lives toying with women; some have made women their pastimes in the brief intervals of strenuous attention to war and to affairs; but Ferdinand was a prince of affairs in which women had no place. As a father, however, he was not wanting in affection.

"My Stephanie!" he said, when he had kissed her upon the cheek. "Politics are a very troublous thing, and all kinds of considerations come into play. The alliances in marriage between princes and princesses are dictated by the necessities of their States rather than by any inclination of their own."

The Emperor felt, because Stephanie, sitting on a low stool at his side, had her hands upon her father's, that the blood stirred very palpably, and he knew that she listened.

"The turn of events has brought your name into question. The Elector Maximilian has put forward a project of marriage. He asks for you."

A crimson flush overspread those pale clear cheeks. So much Ferdinand saw. She kept her gaze steadily away from him.

"What do you think of it, little one?"

She turned her head and looked up at her father, her eyes widely open.

"I think it monstrous! That old man! A man who has already lived a thousand lives to make his last mumbling meal of me who am just newly come into my womanhood! Monstrous! Unspeakably monstrous!"

"He is of a ripe age, certainly, is my cousin Maximilian.

He is in fact fifty-eight, as I am. But he is still full of vigour, a leader of men, a great and renowned prince, and our most trusty ally. Once at least we had been in grave jeopardy but for his counsel and for his armies. Even now we are employing his men and generals in support of our Edicts."

"To slay peaceable burghers, burn their goods, throw down their houses, ravish their daughters! Say this rather!"

"My daughter!" said Ferdinand, and his voice became cold and haughty, "you forget! As a good son of the Church I am bound to extirpate that most pernicious root of heresy from all German lands. There can be no peace till this is done."

The Archduchess Stephanie had gauged her father's religious fanaticism and found it deep, deeper than any measuring-stick of hers. She did not sympathise with it. Like most women she was herself prone to the practices of religion, and in the conduct of life a pagan. She saw no benefit that could come out of the Edict of Restitution. To her mind, money, or goods, or lands were to pass out of the hands of very worthy industrious burghers to maintain lazy and often very dirty priests and monks. She thought it was barely possible, but still possible, for people to get to heaven somehow without them. The Emperor was quite satisfied that they could not. His intentions were sincere, and the Archduchess knew that it was useless to pursue the attack along this line.

"The fall of Magdeburg," she said, "might bring about some sort of alliance of all the Protestant powers. Brandenburg and Saxony at least must join Gustavus. Denmark, the United Provinces, may follow."

"The more reason have we to keep hold of such friends as we have by what entertainment we may."

"Have you so little faith in Maximilian that you should judge him capable of drawing off his men when he learns that I will not wed him?"

"I have always found Maximilian loyal to the Empire. But a friendship such as his should be requited."

"Then let him be requited with gold or with lands, but not with me. Let him draw off his men, his Pappenheim. Then send for the man who shall sweep Gustavus back to his ships, him for whom the Empire waits, him who alone can create armies at a word and lead them."

"Who is this Achilles?" was the faintly ironical question of the Emperor.

"Who but Albrecht von Waldstein?" was the instant, almost triumphant, answer of the Archduchess. She had risen to her feet and faced him with it, voice and gesture and eyes aglow with a conviction that betrayed an intense energy of desire behind it. The Emperor gazed at her with his pale scrutinising eyes, in which was no enthusiasm.

"My dear Stephanie," he said in his half-wearied tone, "if Wallenstein were not a man of middle age, who has married a second wife, one might almost suspect that you were enamoured of him."

She held herself erect, looking at the Emperor, but her eyes were upon a vision far beyond. She said nothing, for the Emperor had not made an end. He had dealt her this thrust of scorn. Now he assailed her with reason.

"It is a year since, on the Elector's day at Regensburg, they clamoured one and all for Wallenstein's dismissal. They urged that he was become too powerful for a subject."

"Maximilian's jealousy!" she interposed.

"Maximilian was one amongst many! I judged the advice sound. I dismissed Wallenstein. My foes were beaten down. There was no need to maintain an army

of seventy thousand men in the field to nourish the ambition of a general. It is enough, Stephanie. No good can come of princesses meddling in politics. Look to it that you entreat not our cousin Maximilian slightly, or even with less than the graciousness that becomes a princess. I am too indulgent. The affair can wait till it be considered further. You would not be the first princess of the house of Habsburg to wed without love. Therefore make no grievance of it!"

He held out his hand, which the Archduchess bent over and kissed, and she left the Emperor once more alone.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE CIRCLE OF THE EMPEROR.

THAT evening Nigel was not left to eat his meal in the little *salle à manger* adjoining his bedchamber, but was invited by the officers of the guard to join them, a compliment that was worth the paying, seeing that the officers of the guard were drawn from the oldest families in Austria and Hungary, and that a mere sub-lieutenant in the guard ranked as a regimental captain in the army, and a captain was equal to a colonel, if not higher, in the point of distinction.

Notwithstanding that he was a regimental officer bearing the rank of captain, and an outlander, a fact which emphasised another fact, that he was a soldier of fortune, or, if we prefer it, a soldier without a fortune, whereas his hosts were men of high family and fortunes who happened to be soldiers, they received him with that perfection of politeness which already characterised the Austrian nobility in so far as it came into daily contact with the court. Something there was of the ceremony and grandiosity of Spain, which the inter-marriages of princes and princesses had brought about, mingled with the brightness and gaiety that sprung of a northern race and northern air, and of a greater activity of body and alertness of mind.

They regarded the sack of Magdeburg as a mere incident, but sufficiently interesting to men who professed the art of war to make them put to their guest a perfect array of questions as to the tactics employed, the relative value of the weapons, and Tilly's projected movements. He had to tell at full length his adventure at Plauen, and they contrived to let him know that he was more fortunate than they in having enjoyed such experiences.

When the supper had proceeded to a pleasant length, if it were not quite so prolonged as that famous meal which Mr Howell, who was secretary to an embassy to Denmark, has related in his letters, consisting as it did of forty courses and thirty-five toasts, the Captain-General of the guard, a venerable officer, who wore the orders of half the kingdoms of Europe, suspended by gold chains and gold brooches, giving almost the similitude of a cuirass, rose, and in the name of the Emperor complimented their guest on the services he had rendered and the signal bravery he had shown at the siege and the storm of Magdeburg. He ended by presenting him with a Colonel's commission under the Emperor's own hand and seal, and drank his health in the most handsome fashion—an example which the whole corps of officers followed with much zest and the draining of many flagons of Tokay.

Nigel was taken indeed by surprise. His blushes testified at once to his habitual modesty, and to his youth. But for the honour of his race and country he regained his self-command in a short space, and made a speech of thanks which, for fluency in the German tongue and the spirit of loyalty to his chosen standard which infused it, gained him an even greater credit in the minds of his hearers. Scotland was to most of them a far-off country, and being far was esteemed uncivilised, and they

marvelled that a Scottish gentleman could without effort assume the ease of manner and the air of compliment in the banqueting-hall of Vienna as well as lead an attacking party, which any officer of proper valour and skill should be able to do.

Just as the supper had concluded and the tables had been cleared for wine and the dice-box, or whatever other pastime was forward, a page arrived to tell him that the Emperor commanded his attendance at his card-party in half an hour. Nigel would perhaps have more willingly sat over his wine with these jovial gallants of the guard. But there was no choice. So that he took leave of the Captain-General and of his other hosts, some of whom had their military rounds to make, and hastened to refresh himself, and make what change in his dress he could for the ordeal of the court reception.

On reaching his bedchamber he was amazed to find it lit up with many candles, and a court suit lying upon his bed, new and of rich stuffs. Everything he needed was there, and a barber was in attendance together with a valet to assist him to make his outward appearance worthy of the occasion.

Nigel had heard of the lavish generosity of Italian princes towards their friends. He knew of favourites both in Spain and in Britain who had been plentifully rewarded by the bestowal of public office or of pension. In France the King's cash-box, which was also the State's, was frequently opened to reward the deserving and undeserving. But it had never before happened to him that he was invited to be of the company of a prince and provided with a new court suit in the bargain. Monarchs were often unmindful of these petty but costly trivialities. But since in his own case the Emperor Ferdinand had expended so much thoughtfulness and a goodly purse of crowns on his wedding garment, Nigel was not disposed

to blame him for departing from the usual rule. It was difficult besides not to feel uncommonly elated when Fortune persisted in making him so avowedly her favourite. And if, while he was being dealt with by the barber, he did wonder how that slightly dry, tired-eyed Emperor had contrived to think two consecutive thoughts about his, Nigel's, wearing apparel, and fell back upon the Arch-duchess Stephanie as the possible donor, he dismissed the latter suggestion because he was not sufficiently full of conceit to credit it, and accepted the first as a very natural explanation, because his opinion of his own services unconsciously coincided with the sense of them he imputed to the Emperor. It must not be forgotten that Tokay in unstinted measure has a tendency to make a man reflect in the first instance what a really fine fellow he is. It is doubtless one of the first qualities of good wine to enhance in the man who drinks it the estimation of his own vintage. Had the page, who as a fact knew nothing, or the barber, or the valet, breathed the name of Father Lamormain, of a surety Nigel would have regarded the idea as humorous, and even at that rather wanting in point. If he had been solemnly assured that Father Lamormain, that very benign Jesuit he had met for the first and only time in his life in the palace garden, was the donor of the suit, he would probably have worn it, but, as the gentleman in one of Shakespeare's plays wore his rue, with a difference.

Not that Nigel Charteris in his braveries was one whit more a braggart or a fop or one iota less a Scottish gentleman than when, stained with blood and smoke, begrimed and weary, he had taken shelter at the hands of Elspeth Reinheit in the old house at Magdeburg. But that evening he did feel that the world was at his feet, and he did make a gallant figure as the doors flew open and the pages, announcing the "high-born and noble Colonel Nigel

von Charteris," admitted him to the presence of his Emperor and the brilliant circle of the court.

The Emperor and his consort alone were seated. The guests were not yet all assembled, and stood about in groups within reach of the royal voices. There were perhaps eight or ten ladies, amongst whom, when his eyes had grown used to the numerous candles and the glitter of jewels, reflected and multiplied by the mirrors of Venetian glass that hung upon the walls, Nigel recognised the Archduchess Stephanie and a younger sister who more resembled the Emperor.

The Archduchess shot him a swift glance of recognition, and the smile, which rather accompanied than followed it, bestowed not upon him but upon some chance-favoured auditor with whom she talked, seemed to imply approval of his choice of a court dress. That swift glance of hers was enough to tell him that their rencontre of the morning was, if it could not be swept from remembrance, at least to be treated as if it had not been.

It was Father Lamormain who, gliding to his side, assumed the gracious part of cicerone.

"And are you still pleased with your good news, colonel?" he asked with his benevolent smile of universal fatherhood.

"More and more, Father! This morning there was the promise. This evening it is in flower!"

"The blossom," said the priest, looking at the court suit, "becomes the tree if the tree yield good fruit." A saying which left Nigel puzzled, intimating as it did that his reward was not so much for service done as for services to do. He had no time to ponder it, for Father Lamormain had led him to the Archduchess Stephanie and was presenting him.

"Your Highness! may I present to you the youngest Colonel of Musketeers in the Imperial armies, Mr Nigel

Charteris, who has had the honour and the peril of bearing Count Tilly's despatches from Magdeburg!"

"I am pleased to greet you!" said the Archduchess, giving him her hand to kiss. "I trust your journey was as pleasant as the issue was successful."

As Nigel had bent to kiss the long slender fingers that were so like the Emperor's, he seemed to see again those of Ottilie von Thüringen binding up the wound of Elspeth Reinheit. He answered her—

"The journey was not so perilous, your Highness, as the reward is great in your Highness's gracious welcome!" And greatly daring he gazed for a moment with unfeigned admiration at the eyes of the Archduchess.

"Count Tilly's captains are swift to learn, Father?" she said, smiling.

"They are more teachable than princesses!" said Father Lamormain, with such banter in his tone as the privileged spiritual director of the family might employ. "And princesses," he added, "are swift to teach."

A saying which the Archduchess and Nigel alike felt might be innocent or barbed with irony.

Father Lamormain did not leave him till he had made the round of the guests. Nigel's brain was becoming clearer as he became used to the scene, and the effects of the excellent Tokay were wellnigh spent. He learned by observation in what very real respect the whole court held the Jesuit father. This polished and witty priest had something in the way of compliment for all the ladies, something flattering for the great lords and lordlings. But for the Father there was no covert sneer, or half attention, or sign of fear. There was real respect, and something that resembled the perfect confidence of friendship.

Last of all, the Elector Maximilian, with his eternal

half-smile, left the Emperor's immediate group and accosted Nigel.

"So Father Lamormain has taken you in hand, Colonel! They say that this is a greater mark of honour than even the Emperor can bestow. Beware, however, of any love secrets. He will worm them out of you!"

"He does not wear them upon his sleeve, your Highness!" said the priest, with a glance over in the direction of the Archduchess Stephanie, which was not understood by Nigel.

"And in what plight are my Bavarians?" the Elector went on.

Father Lamormain beat a retreat. They would find much to talk about, and if the fathoming of Nigel's leanings were necessary Maximilian was as astute as himself. Luckily Nigel held a high opinion of Pappenheim, whom many regarded as the foremost general in Germany, even before Wallenstein, but who was a soldier and nothing more, no politician or ambitious seeker after power.

"You were with Tilly before?"

"No, sire! With Wallenstein from the campaign against Mansfeld to the end of his command!"

To the "Ah" with which this was received Nigel attached the significance it bore.

"Have you seen him since his . . . resignation?"

"Yes, sire; at Eger on my journey here."

"And how does he bear his retirement?"

"In truth I know almost nothing, sire. When I was under him I rarely saw him, and was not of his familiar circle, if indeed he had such. I do not know. He asked for my company at Eger to divide a bottle of wine with him. He seems to occupy himself with astronomy and the mathematics."

"I have heard," rejoined Maximilian, "that he had

great acquaintance and much controversy with a learned doctor, one Paracelsus, but these matters are beyond my ken. Men and women are more to me than the stars."

Several gentlemen of the court had gathered round the Elector, and it was the hearing of the name of Wallenstein that drew them, for it was well known that the Elector and he were on terms of discord. In the days of the Winter King it had been Maximilian and his armies who had been in fact the Emperor's legions, then as a counterpoise the Emperor had raised up Wallenstein. When Wallenstein had made Maximilian the pale shadow of an armed power, Maximilian had plotted till Wallenstein was deposed and his army scattered to the ten thousand hamlets of Germany.

"A veritable Cincinnatus!" said an elderly gentleman.

"He raised cabbages for sauerkraut, did he not?" a younger man asked.

"Your Cincinnatus," said the Elector, "raiseth weeds of a poisonous and rebellious nature."

"Such as, sire?" a staid and solemn-faced minister of state inquired.

"Ambition, my Lord! It brought Cæsar to the ground, and Cæsar was a greater man. When Wallenstein, then a rich Bohemian landlord, discovered that he had the genius of organising an army, he began to think he had discovered in himself another Cæsar. He thought that to command a great army, to find its food and pay, was absolute power. He forgot that that consent of the Emperor, which alone had made it possible, was the real source of power, and that the consent might be withdrawn. You all know what happened in fact. He has no patriotism. His country, his Emperor, his creed, is Wallenstein; and he would as soon serve Gustavus, if Gustavus would promise him a kingdom, as serve the Emperor."

The Elector Maximilian had raised his voice a little as he spoke his last sentences. The Emperor, turning in his chair from his cards not far away, said—

“Your favourite topic, cousin! He did us good service in our need.”

“In truth, sire!” said the Archduchess Stephanie, also addressing Maximilian. “Age should be more lenient to age and honourable service.”

Nigel wondered why the Elector showed so much the symptoms of a frown when his mouth, so much of it as was visible, essayed a smile as he turned towards the Archduchess.

The Emperor and Father Lamormain, who was of his party at cards, exchanged a guarded glance.

“You remind me of that, Stephanie, which in your presence I had forgotten.”

With which saying he strode to her side with an air of gallantry, which had sat well upon a younger man, and engaged her in a conversation out of earshot, as he meant, of the rest of the company.

At this point a page came to the Emperor and gave him a message in a low tone. The page went out, and in a moment the doors opened.

“His Grace the Duke of Friedland” was announced; and instantly the company sat or stood as if petrified.

Albrecht von Walstein entered, attired not plainly, but as became a magnifico of the Empire. There was violet velvet slashed with green silk and sewn with pearls, and all point devise. He made three obeisances as he approached the Emperor, and kissed his hand, then that of his consort. The Emperor bade him be seated.

“You have been long coming to Vienna, Duke, but seeing that you are here you are well-come. You have news?”

“Sire! I was but a few days since at Eger, where I

have a poor dwelling-place, when I heard that the King of Sweden has left Frankfort, has marched to Werben, where the river Havel pours into the Elbe, and has there entrenched his army in a fortified camp. Brandenburg has given up Spandau and Custrin. We are shut off from the North."

The Emperor's face became a thought graver than usual. So did those of Father Lamormain and of Maximilian, who, leaving the Archduchess, drew near at a sign from the Emperor.

"How many men hath he?"

"My report says forty thousand, all veteran troops. Saxony and Brandenburg can raise another forty thousand between them."

"With a few reinforcements, Tilly and Pappenheim should be able to stay his march," said Maximilian.

To which Wallenstein said nothing. His *rôle* was the disinterested friend, the wealthy noble to whom war was of no moment.

For a moment there was a curious silence.

Wallenstein would not ask for a command. To offer him a subordinate one was to invite a cold refusal. Father Lamormain and Maximilian were resolutely opposed to any offer being made, and the Emperor knew it. Yet he felt by no means sure that Tilly and Pappenheim could stem the Swedish tide, and he was the head and front and citadel of the Empire, fully aware of his responsibilities towards the state and towards the church, especially the latter.

At Maximilian's words the Archduchess Stephanie made an involuntary movement forward, but checked herself and stood where she was. Nigel, from the place where he stood amid a knot of courtiers, could see her face.

It bore that strange rapt expression of the eyes that he had seen in the vision of Bramante's conjuring, and the

eyes were fixed on Wallenstein. Indeed, Wallenstein looked up for an instant and saw them. Nigel could have sworn that a flush swept below the swarthy and much-lined skin of the great commander; but the face with its high cheek-bones and small bright eyes had recovered its bronze composure in the instant.

CHAPTER XV.

THE ARCHDUCHESS AND WALLENSTEIN.

THE persons who witnessed the unexpected arrival of Wallenstein asked themselves why he had come; Nigel because to his reflective mind the ostensible reason, anxiety to impart the news of Gustavus to the Emperor, was insufficient; the Archduchess Stephanie because she desired with all the intensity of woman that another cause might be at work.

Nigel in the camp with Tilly had heard accounts, more or less garbled, of the famous meeting of the Electors with the Emperor at Ratisbon a year before. Reichstag, the Diet, or Day of the State, was the name of such meetings, and that had been a momentous one for Wallenstein, for the world. All the Electors were there save only the Elector Palatine, the Winter-King, who was a wanderer over the face of Europe. And without the conclave were Friar Joseph, "His grey Eminence," the familiar of Cardinal Richelieu, and Cardinal Caraffa, the Pope's nuncio. France and Italy alike on this occasion were pulling at the Electoral puppet-strings, and making them hold up hands for the dismissal of Wallenstein, the "insolent Wallenstein." And when a captain-general, for four years in the field, has set all the Electors of Germany, Catholic and Protestant, against him, it may be

deduced that he has shown himself careless of giving offence, and has forgotten the respect due to princes. The Emperor had wished to retain him. He knew that he had been well served, and in so far as his extreme religious views would allow him, he was a just and certainly courageous prince. But he had been forced to defer to the Electors who had chosen him to be Emperor.

Nigel agreed that a man as great as Wallenstein would never have ridden from Eger to Vienna to bring this news to the Emperor, notwithstanding that, if Wallenstein had ever shown anything approaching to personal affection and deference to man, it had been to the Emperor. He would have sent a swift messenger, or allowed the Emperor to learn the news in his own way, as he would have learned it in a day or two at the most. And Nigel was right in his conjecture.

The following afternoon the Archduchess Stephanie, with two ladies in demure attendance, took the air in a light carriage, which, for its elegance, was still an object of admiration in the streets of Vienna. It was said to have been a present to the Emperor from his brother monarch, Louis Treize. And was not the Queen of Louis Treize Anne of Austria?

The carriage stopped at Otto Fugger's in the Rudolf Strasse. Otto Fugger was the richest banker in Vienna, and was the brother of Jacob Fugger of Antwerp, and cousin of Wilhelm Fugger of Amsterdam, and of Antonio Fugger in Venice. The Archduchess descended and entered. All the aristocracy of Europe dealt with the Fuggers.

And when the Archduchess was ushered with great politeness by Otto Fugger himself into one of his several libraries on an upper floor, and the banker had bowed low and left her, she found one she expected standing by a casement which looked out into a beautiful garden.

In the habit which he wore, of sombre hue and formal cut, rich withal but not conspicuous, he might have passed for one of those very prosperous merchants that were making their presence felt in the large cities, if the alert bearing of the man, and the air of domination, had not proclaimed one of a superior rank and a military caste.

The man and the woman looked at one another. In the man's look was questioning. It asked, "How can this woman serve my purpose? What makes her wish to serve it?"

In the woman's was rejoicing at some purpose partly achieved, and something of timidity.

The looks were instantaneous; the pause before the ~~speech~~ but momentary.

"At last, Albrecht von Waldstein!" She spoke in low soft tones, and held out both hands, as if he should take them both into captivity.

"I am here because you have willed it, Stephanie!"

It was a personal touch, not an outcome of his immense pride. Here they met on another plane than that of the life of courts. And Stephanie was so young. He took her long slender fingers in his large masterful brown hands and kissed them both, in his heart rather amused.

Let us not be mistaken. Wallenstein was not led to Vienna by the God of Love. Nor did he imagine that he was. He came, and knew that he had come, because of the perfect circle of Pietro Bramante, who was rather the priest of Apollo, because of the secant ellipse, whose right focus was the centre of his circle.

He came because of the image of Stephanie, which he had seen, or thought he had seen, at Eger, even as Saul saw the wraith of Samuel, or thought he saw it, in the caves at Endor.

But Pietro Bramante had prophesied, or so Wallenstein had read the prophecy, that his way to the complete circle

was by making the heart of woman the pivot and centre of his intelligence. It was not easy for Wallenstein to formulate the idea in words; but if there were a meaning in the mystery it must be that through the love of Stephanie he would arrive at the culminating point of success; and Stephanie was the daughter of the Emperor.

Therefore he looked curiously at her, wondering at the miracle, as any man who experiences it must wonder at the miracle of the love of woman.

Wallenstein had never been a habitant of the palaces of kings. As little as need was had he come to Vienna on sparse visits to the Emperor. He had seen and spoken to the Archduchess Stephanie, when, six years before, he had laid his offer before the Emperor. He remembered her as a tall, slim maiden with large, dark, wistful, following eyes, a child of moods. He remembered her when two years more had passed, what a glorious triumphant pair of years, in which he had gathered his army, marched against Mansfeld, overcome him at Dessau on the Elbe, then harried him through Silesia into Hungary, forced his ally, Bethlen Gabor, to throw down his arms, and driven Mansfeld over the border into Bosnia to die of a broken fame. Before going into winter quarters he had paid a fleeting visit to Vienna to receive his first meed of commendation from the Emperor. The Archduchess Stephanie had ripened to the first promise of a completer womanhood, gained in erectness, in rounder curves, and over her face and bearing had stolen virginal radiance and conscious modesty, not unmingled with the Habsburg pride of race. Wallenstein remembered how she too had greeted him in her own way with two sprigs of laurel and a little speech which died on her lips.

And now she had reached the perfect May of womanhood. "What then? At last, Albrecht von Waldstein!"

"I am here because you have willed it, Stephanie!"

"Say rather because the fates have willed it!" she said in a tone in which awe and triumph were mingled, and her eyes looked out as through a mist. Wallenstein felt a thrill go through him, something unknown to his cold intelligence, something which roused latent fire in him, and infused into him a spirit more akin in rarity to hers.

He still held her slender fingers in his brown sinewy hands as if he would suck in more of that ethereal fluid fire.

"You would have come of your own accord because of your interest in Albrecht von Waldstein?" There was approval, condescension, petition for her assent in his tones.

"Something of you grew into my girlhood, Albrecht! I cannot tell how. When you, a simple gentleman of Bohemia, came to my father and in his troubled hour offered to raise up an army to defend him against his enemies, I had a feeling of exultation. Something told me that here was greatness, a new Hercules come to earth."

Wallenstein's eyes, those cold eyes of his, glowed at her saying. Prodigious egotist that he was! He accepted her words as those of an oracle. He drank in the significance of her words, but of their relation to the feelings of the priestess that uttered them he divined less even than he valued them. To him her words confirmed him in his own estimate of himself. But he was too little a connoisseur of precious nonsubstantial things to show surprise or wonder at the priceless worth of that young princess's worship.

"Six years ago," he said, "you acclaimed my star on the horizon of your heart."

"Yes, Albrecht! And then when you came again, do

you remember my poor sprigs of laurel which I was almost too shy to give you?"

"I have them yet, Stephanie!" It was true. He had them. They were an emblem of his advancing fortunes bestowed by the daughter of the Emperor. Of the heart that had prompted the gift, the shy, proud, full, maidenly heart, he had known nothing.

"And as your star waxed, so I rejoiced and said, 'Albrecht von Waldstein is become equal to the greatest princes of the earth.' You and your armies filled all my mind. My pride in you became a great part of me."

Her eyes were cast down so that he saw little but the soft black fringes of the lids; her rich voice was modulated to all but a whisper. And as the man gazed at her, drinking in her words and watching the heave and fall of her bosom, an unusual gentleness crept over him and he began to see the wonder of her.

"Gracious and beautiful princess!" he said. "To think that as I climbed I knew nothing of the spirit that spoke secretly to mine and urged me forward and upward." There was something of self-reproach in his tone as for something beautiful in a glimpse of the valley that a climber misses and learns of in after days.

She went on with her confession—

"I prayed for your success. I do not know what I would have had you do, until the day of Ratisbon, when all the dogs in Germany bayed at you and the Emperor sent an embassy—it was that in fact—to beg you to lay down the power, the stupendous power, you wielded. Then, oh the direful days they were! I hoped, I feared. I dreaded and longed to hear that, like Cæsar of old, you were crossing the Rubicon and were marching on the capital."

Wallenstein heaved a mighty sigh.

"You felt, Stephanie, what it cost me!"

The Archduchess looked up into his eyes.

"It is true. My heart had awakened. The woman mourned and would not be comforted. She would have had you king! King, Albrecht! And you put everything aside to resume a private station. And some said that therein you did the greatest act of your life to make the way easy for the Emperor and bring peace into the land."

"And you, Stephanie?"

"Not I!" She raised her head proudly to its full eminence, that queenly brow with its twin lakes of unfathomable light. "Not I! What to me was the peace of Germany, or of the Emperor? I would have had you march on to victory or death. Fortune must be taken at the flood. She seldom comes twice for the same barque."

"You have the spirit of your eagles, Stephanie! Trust me! I weighed the chances and put off the hour because the hour was destined to return again. It was tempting fortune; but it was better to resign my baton gracefully at the Emperor's command than to lose all in one desperate, unconsidered rebellion."

"Rebellion is for subjects! But remember, Albrecht von Waldstein, that if you would mate with eagles you must prove yourself their peer. Fly high and boldly!"

Wallenstein experienced another thrill. This time a fresh thought leapt into being. "Mate with eagles? What could she mean?" An unwonted light broke over the cold, lined face.

"You cannot mean that in the hour of victory you will be my hostage against the Emperor, Stephanie?"

"The day you win Bohemia for your crown I share it with you!"

"Bohemia! And you, Stephanie?" Even now he could scarcely believe his ears. He saw quite clearly the immense advantage it would be to him to wed Stephanie:

how it would tie the hands of the Emperor and prevent the otherwise inevitable reprisals.

"And Holy Church? I am wedded man!"

"The Church can give dispensations where she wishes. She shall wish, even if you have to march on Rome!"

"And you pledge yourself to help me counter their Jesuit plans?"

"I do, Albrecht. See, I kiss the cross! I vow it solemnly! And as earnest, let me tell you they would have me marry Maximilian!"

"God in heaven!" exclaimed Wallenstein. "That shall not be, if there be a nunnery to keep you safe on this side of the Alps."

Wallenstein made no movement of passion. He looked at her and saw that she was desirable and lovely beyond the common allurements of women, beyond the beauty of all princesses he had seen. But he saw, too, that there was something lofty in her soul, a virgin chastity, that forbade all trivial thought of dalliance. It was a solemn compact.

He knelt at her feet. She laid one soft hand upon his head and said—

"Be my knight, Albrecht, without fear. And when all the fields are won, I await you."

He took her other hand and kissed it. The vibration of a strong emotion passed through him. He was left alone.

CHAPTER XVI.

NIGEL'S NEW REGIMENT.

ON the next day Wallenstein departed as secretly as he had come. Father Lamormain ascertained that he did not return to Eger. One rumour had it that he had gone to his estate in Friedland, which is in the north-eastern part of Bohemia, bordered by Silesia on one side and the kingdom of Saxony on the other, a remote mountainous region, sparsely inhabited. The rumour may well have been true, for that was where the Duchess of Friedland lay at that time, and it had never been said that her lord neglected her for any other dame, unless it were Dame Bellona, who, ugly as she is, has in her time made many good wives jealous, and proved fatal to untold thousands of her wooers.

Three of these wooers, no longer perhaps so ardent or so able as of old, advised the Emperor in warlike matters. Colonel von Falck had taken part in the wars against the Turks in the days of the late Emperor Rudolf, and had lost an eye. He was almost patriarchal, but men said of him that he was a tremendous judge of Tokay, and unerring in his selection of officers. Of the former branch of military knowledge he gave almost daily proof, and his reputation in the latter, like many official reputations, rested on evidence which was quite irrefragable, since no

one knew what it was. The second was a retired Master of Camp, a man just past middle age, who had had the misfortune to lose an arm, his left, fortunately, at the Weisser Berge. He was an acknowledged authority on waggons, horses, stores, cannon, and equipment generally. And an officer who has lost an arm by a cannon-ball must be admitted to have some practical knowledge of artillery. The third officer was the Grand Duke Lothar, a blood relation of the Emperor, who, owing to a very real lameness, acquired in his subaltern days, had been obliged to confine his military excursions within the narrow limits of Vienna or Ratisbon. But he had stored up a profound knowledge of Cæsar's 'Commentaries,' and was very well acquainted with the theory of war as it was then understood.

It was the Emperor, usually in consort with the experienced Maximilian, who formed the general plan of campaign. If the Council's opinion coincided with the Emperor's, as it usually did, on a review of the plan, its execution was left in the hands of the general in command of the army, and the function of the council was then to take all possible steps to provide reinforcements, arms, and officers.

Before this sage professional committee Nigel was summoned.

"You have learned the manège, colonel?" was the abrupt inquiry of the oldest officer.

"What is the complete equipment of a trooper?" was that of the camp-master.

"How many troopers do you require in a regiment of dragoons, and what officers? How many squadrons could you make of it? How many troops go to a squadron?" These were Lothar's.

Nigel, greatly wondering, answered all these readily and satisfactorily.

Then followed a catechism of the tactics of cavalry by

the Grand Duke Lothar, who drew lines on a sheet of paper to illustrate his meaning. These also Nigel answered, for in a prolonged period of active service little had escaped his eye or his ear of what happened in any department of arms.

The three military councillors exchanged nods and whispers of approval.

"We are going to recommend his Imperial Majesty to cancel your commission in his musketeers and appoint you to the command of a new regiment of light horse!" said von Falck.

"I am forming the regiment," said the camp-master. "Bohemians, Austrians—all riders from their youth—with a sprinkling of old cavalrymen. They will need some shaping!"

"The other officers are being selected," said the Grand Duke. "You will spend the next week or two getting them equipped, and horsed, and drilled. Then your orders will be given you."

"I am at your Excellencies' service!" said Nigel.

Three days afterwards, spent in wearisome discussions, conducted on the one side in half the patois of Europe, and on the other in tolerably good German and an admixture of plain Scots, the subject being horses, Nigel was wishing devoutly that he had never seen Vienna, never become the favoured child of fortune, never——

"Well, Blick, what is it *now*?"

"Magdeburg's wellnigh spent, colonel!"

"Is that so?" was Nigel's rejoinder.

"Never saw such a place as Vienna," said Blick. "The beer is too light!"

"Well!" said Nigel, "you must drink more of it, or less of it."

"Yes, colonel! And the stagshorn dice are too light above and too heavy below!"

"Worse and worse! You'll have to give up play!"

"It'll give me up," said Blick. "And the wenches, colonel!"

"Well? Are they too light also?"

"I am not a bad-looking fellow, colonel! But if I stay here . . . they're the very devil . . ." groaned Sergeant Blick.

"You want to get back to Count Tilly? Is that it?"

"Not for twenty rix-dollars!"

"Well! Tell me! What is it you want?"

"I want to be sergeant in your new regiment!"

"What do you know of cavalry?" asked Nigel.

"I know men," said Blick stubbornly. "I can drill them. I know horses. I can break them in. My father was a smith, and my uncle a horse-dealer. My grandfather was hung for stealing horses. It's in the blood. In three days I will have that mob of rascals at my heel. I am Sergeant Blick! I say it!"

Nigel looked at Sergeant Blick with a good deal of interest. He had looked at him before, as he had looked at interminable ranks of soldiers, and had never observed that in Blick, as in himself, although Blick knew no reading or writing, grew the stubborn thistle of ambition. He also remembered a dozen instances of good sergeantry which Blick had displayed. It dawned upon his mind that, as it takes years to make a good ploughman, so it takes years to produce the good sergeant; and that without good sergeants it is impossible to make good regiments.

Sergeant Blick, despite his words, stood stiffly at attention, awaiting the settlement of his destiny. There were at least two scars on his face, which were an abiding proof that he had faced both pike and sword, and his complexion, originally fair (he was a North German from Münster), had been tanned and weather-beaten. The

light-blue eyes, somewhat hard in the glint, were full of resolution and vigour, if the cheeks and the mouth did smack somewhat of the beer-can, as did the great girth of his waist, hardly counterbalanced by the greater girth of his shoulders.

"Sergeant is it? You can have it! You begin to-morrow; and keep all the corporals sober till we are ready to start, four days from now."

"Four days! The devil himself couldn't bring that mob of wild Zigeuners and half-cooked hinds into the likeness of a regiment in four days."

"Nevertheless it must be done!" said Nigel.

The new sergeant grunted some guttural remarks, which Nigel took in good part, as they were hurled less at himself than at things in general, which, as every one knows, are always deserving of the extreme of objurgation. Then the sergeant paused.

"Well? You want something else?"

"Yes, colonel! This little bodkin that the lady at Magdeburg tried to push through your steel cap! I tried to bargain with a dirty Jew for a crown or so. He said it was good silver, but he asked how I came by it. I hit him a buffet, but he only snarled that neither he nor any other dealer in Vienna would buy it because of something or other, arms or what not, on the hilt."

"Oh! Let me look at it! So! It is a curious device. Well, I'll give you a crown for it. At all events I have a good right to it if any one has. The point was meant for my head."

Sergeant Blick took his crown with thanks, saluted, and went out. To realise one's ambition and a crown, albeit a silver one, in the same half-hour, is always worth while.

It was true that to Nigel the weapon, which, had it been used otherwise, might have slain him, was a posses-

sion of interest. But a further look at it, or rather at the ornamentation of the haft, which was good silversmith's work, revealed to him what it had revealed to the Jew, who was too careful to buy that which might put a rope round his neck, something, in his opinion, stolen from some dangerously high place.

Again he asked himself, "Who is Ottilie von Thüringen?"

"By Saint Andrew!" he exclaimed as some one entered.

"Heilige Frau!" the other cried in equal astonishment.

"So you are my new colonel, Charteris?"

"And you, Hildebrand?"

"I am to be your major, it seems, by the grace of General von Falck with one eye, Camp-Master von Pratz with one arm, and his Highness the Grand Duke Lothar, to whom regiments are sheets of paper and the officers numbers."

Major Hildebrand von Hohendorf did not seem altogether gratified.

"Dear old comrade!" said Nigel warmly, shaking him by the hand, "it would have given me greater pleasure to have been your major than it does to be your colonel. You were buried in Hradschin. Now you may conclude by becoming Field-Marshal."

Nigel knew that Hildebrand was not one to nurse small jealousy, and was amenable to the gentle influence of a bottle and an honest friend taken together. The bottle was soon forthcoming, and so was Hildebrand's pipe.

"Comes of helping to sack Magdeburg and carrying despatches, I suppose," said Hildebrand, a twinkle becoming apparent in his eyes. "Or have you been making love to Lothar's wife. They say she names most of the colonels! Ha! What's this pretty thing?"

He picked up the tiny dagger, which for the moment Nigel had forgotten.

"That's a little trifle a noble lady in Magdeburg tried to stick into my neck!" said Nigel. "My sergeant picked it up."

"Pretty thing!" said Hildebrand, examining it. "Bears the arms of the Habsburgs, too!" The peculiarity did not seem to strike very deep, for he went off to another topic—

"Now, what have we got to do? It seems to me we've got to make a regiment and then constitute ourselves free companions for a few weeks, maybe months, and then join Tilly!"

"Listen!" said Nigel. "We have to cross Southern Bohemia, the Upper Palatinate, enter Wurzburg, then Hesse Cassel, to frighten the Landgrave, ride eastward to the Elbe, and find Gustavus. Having satisfied ourselves of the direction of his march, we are to hang on to the advance-guard, and give early and constant information to Count Tilly and Pappenheim. When the two armies come into touch we are to place our regiment under Tilly's orders."

"Lord, what a riding and camping and sleeping under the trees," said Hildebrand.

"Make us the most serviceable regiment of cavalry in the whole army," Nigel consoled. "You'll be as thin as a pikestaff and as hard! No Tokay in the Thüringerwald!"

"The beer might be worse!" rejoined Hildebrand. "I've tasted it."

CHAPTER XVII.

FAREWELL TO THE ARCHDUCHESS.

As Nigel thought he owed that great windfall of fortune, the restoration of his cherished wallet of despatches, to the Archduchess Stephanie, insomuch as it was a direct outcome of her mysterious association with Wallenstein, so he was inclined, without evidence, to attribute to her this second shaking of the tree, which had brought to his feet the still riper fruit of the command of the regiment of horse. Perhaps the joking of Hildebrand had left behind in his mind some traces of its passing. It certainly was not due to any conceit that he had made any impression on the heart of the Archduchess. But it was just possible that her sympathy with the mind and destiny of Wallenstein might have displayed itself in an endeavour to promote the fortunes of one who had been, and might some day be again, with Wallenstein.

An unquenchable desire pursued him. It had no effect upon his military duties, for at those he worked as one possessed. The horses, a motley but on the whole a useful collection, were allotted to their riders, the riders distributed into troops and half troops, the old soldiers converted into troop sergeants and corporals, and all kept busy at their exercising. Hildebrand and all the other officers grumbled at this intolerable, but undoubtedly

affable, Scot, who let no man rest nor rested himself. But as daylight fell, and with it the last bulwarks of human patience, and the quarters and the taverns once more welcomed the "Rough Riders," as some wit of the canteens christened them, Nigel was fain to seek rest and refresh himself. It was then, in the moments of relaxation, that the desire came upon him to seek out the Archduchess.

The strange likeness that she bore to the fugitive Ottilie intrigued him. Ottilie in the cathedral of Erfurt had seemed, if his ears had not belied him, to pray for Wallenstein. Half an hour afterwards she had breathed scorn of Wallenstein. The Archduchess had named him in a way that gave a hint of an amiable alliance between them. Had she any influence with Lothar, or General von Falck, or the redoubtable Camp-Master, and exercised it to gain him this commission? If not, to what circumstances did he owe it? Could the Emperor be so lacking in tried cavalry officers that he, who was not a cavalryman, should be selected? Self-pride urged that his experience in the wars was his real recommendation for what must prove a perilous and delicate work. The Scots have always been said to have a "gude conceit" of themselves; and Nigel was not without it. But his Scots caution tempered it. He gave self-pride its due weight and no more, and looked outside for the real reasons.

But to approach the Archduchess was not easy. He had been allotted other quarters in the part of the palace devoted to the officers of the guard. He could not without remark place himself in her way in the gallery of portraits. Nor could he make an assignation to meet her, as the officers of the guard did, with the ladies-in-waiting, whom among themselves they called in their familiar German fashion Gretchen, Bette, or Lotta. They might boast contemptuously of favours behind their charmers'

backs, while professing a most poetical admiration to their faces. He could do neither. There was a gulf not easy to bridge between a lady-in-waiting and an Archduchess.

Nigel had acquired a certain distrust of messages verbal or written, for his short intercourse with courtiers had engendered the belief that one half of the denizens of the palace, high and low, were spies upon the other half, and that Father Lamormain heard everything. But as write he must, he bethought him of certain poetical exercises of his which he had practised lamely enough while at the University of St Andrews, in fond imitation of the poets of the court of Queen Elizabeth, where every one rhymed that could hold a quill. He drew with great pains the circle, the oval, and the curve of Pietro Bramante at the head, and, after many attempts in the long unaccustomed art, involving one hundred and four elisions and at least four separate drafts, he wrote beneath the figure the following lines, hoping that the whole might excite her curiosity if not her admiration, and lead to the audience so much desired :—

By Eastern mage this secret figure limned
 Is symbol that my barque of Life, outbound
 From ports forgot for shores by mist bedimmed,
 Should fetch the centre of this perfect round ;
 Nor should one miss to see the focus 'tis
 Of a consummate oval : beacon light
 That points a haven to all argosies.
 Imperial Eyes, that do illume my night,
 My barque sets sail. Suffer that she clear
 Her harbour dues, and from her cargazon
 Proffer these petalled blushes of the year,
 Which, tho' they fade, as must my Argus soon
 Into the dim horizon, still implore
 But access, and a smile ; they dare no more !

—N. C.

"Now," said Nigel to himself, "if I do but send Sergeant Blick to her waiting-maid with this sonnet ensconced in a basket of roses it is odds but her Highness gets it, and if any one intercept it beshrew me if he make anything of it, for I can make little of it myself."

The plan, clumsy or not, was successful. Sergeant Blick could be very stupid on occasions, till he knew he had what he wanted, and it cost him some pains before he could arrive at the personal attendant of the Archduchess. Then a handsome bribe for herself and the direct and not super-refined flatteries of the sergeant procured the faithful delivery of the gift.

Nigel had sent the drawing of the figure to meet either fortune. If she had not seen it before, it at all events assisted to explain the allusions of the sonnet; and if she had, by the hand of Wallenstein, it would justify his request as showing that he himself understood the linking of the three destinies.

As he sat with Hildebrand at his evening meal the day following, he was summoned and bidden to attend in the garden of the palace at the hour of nine, when he would be met at the nearest gate.

This involved some explanation to Hildebrand, who, receiving the other's assent to his own hint of an assignation, merely laughed and asked no more.

Nigel was punctual, and the same page who had introduced him to the Archduchess in the gallery met him, and bowing, led the way by a path little difficult to remember through the garden, where he had met Father Lamormain, to a little orchard close, which was separated from the garden by a thick hedge, within which was a wall. The page unlocked the gate of this with a key, which he then handed to Nigel, bowed again, and turned as if to go. Nigel entered the orchard close, and following a little path between two rows of trees came to an open

bower, which had a carpet of thick sward, an old stone seat, a screen of yews and laurels all about save for the entrance and the exit opposite.

The night was matchless with moonlight. The trees shone whitely. Deep shadows fell from trees and bushes which were full of foliage. Out of a shadow stepped the Archduchess Stephanie, a dark-hued velvet cloak dependent from her shoulders and open, displaying her milk-white neck and bosom, and a robe of some sheeny tissue of gold thread and silk that glittered here and there as she moved, whose texture caught the moonbeams. Upon her head she wore a little golden fillet of antique work, which seemed to confine her profusion of black curls that for the rest framed in her glorious face and danced in the night breeze upon her shoulders. The dark eyebrows and the long lashes, like thickets half concealing twin lakes, made her complexion look paler than usual. But her red full lips parted in a smile.

Her beauty, intensified by the moonlight, and suffused with something more of air and sky, her ever astonishing resemblance to the strange Otilie von Thüringen, together took Nigel by storm. The shock of it thrilled him. No Wallenstein of forty-eight, wrapped securely in the husk of his own fortunes, but a living man with all the ripe vintage of twenty-five surging in his veins, was Nigel. What would the world of men of forty-eight not give to have the glorious energy, the unconquerable vigour, the joyous ardour for love of twenty-five, of twenty-five that can quaff and quaff again and still hold out the bowl for more? Give? Another world!

Was it perchance precisely fair? The law of Archduchesses is sure their own, and no man can gainsay it.

Nigel, bewildered for a moment, stammered out—

“The Queen of Night!” and knelt to kiss her long slender fingers.

As he rose to his feet again she laid a hand lightly on his arm and said with a twinkle of merriment in her rich voice—

“Strange and inconsequent mixture are you, man! You face sword and fire, and lose not a heart-beat, nor a patch of colour. You meet a woman in the moonlight, and straightway your knees must knock, and you must tremble like a steeple in the wind.”

“I crave pardon, your Highness!” said Nigel, recovering his boldness. “Great supreme beauty such as yours, if there be any like it anywhere, must needs give a man more than a feeling of awe!”

“Now you talk like a bold wooer and a poet. Faith! you have more than a touch of the poet, though my skill in the English tongue is not great enough for me to put a right value on your verses. ’Tis seven years since my cousin, the Infanta, thought to wed England. We all learned English in those days.”

“But your Highness understood!” said Nigel eagerly. “It is but a day or two at most and I must ride into the very teeth of Gustavus. I burned to see your Highness, to thank you for my fortunes, and say that if your Highness has need of me at any time——”

“You will drop your regiment of Rough-riders like a hot iron and ride for me? And this is loyalty to the House of Habsburg!” Her smile blunted the edge of her ridicule.

“Saving my duty as a soldier, your Highness is *my* House of Habsburg!” he rejoined with such an earnestness that broke down her fence of raillery.

“You Scots! Full of conceit! Sensitive! Brave to the degree that you do not even know you are brave! Kindly, so that you would die and not grudge the gift! . . . I shall not tempt you from your duty; but if I call you by this sign”—she drew out the figure from its

hiding-place—"come what may . . . I look to you. It will be no little matter."

Nigel's eyes were full upon her, for there was a solemnity in her voice, a note of strong appeal as from one high spirit calling to another and conscious of the other's attuning. He drew his sword and pressed the hilt to his lips in token of his fealty.

Then it pleased the Archduchess to pace to and fro for a while beneath the trees in silence. She was in truth full of emotion, which was all but too strong for her. The nearness of Nigel, who walked beside her, was one cause of trouble. She had told herself that she loved Wallenstein, the dark, inscrutable organiser of armies, that she had always loved him. But did she sway the spirit of Wallenstein, the heart of Wallenstein, so that it vibrated, if heart or spirit can vibrate, to her touch? She did not seek to answer it. She knew that this stranger Scot with the eagle eyes and bearing was nearer to her in the spring of his years and of his intelligence, albeit one of her father's mercenaries, who might perchance become another Tilly, never a Wallenstein. "And why not?" she asked herself. Then she answered it. "Too much heart!"

Of a sudden she broke the silence again—

"I like you, Colonel Nigel! I trust you! I am perhaps going into a nunnery for a season; perhaps for always!"

"Your Highness! Into a nunnery!" Nigel's astonishment and his sorrow were racing for the mastery.

"They wish me to marry Maximilian of Bavaria!"

"The Jesuits? Your Highness will not?"

"I have told them that asked, 'Sooner a nunnery, or to wed a private gentleman who is not of the blood royal.'"

The blood coursed like a river through the young

officer's veins. If—— He put the thought away sternly.

"Many things may happen. I must gain time. Some other league or bond may be formed and other interests may thwart it! I tell you so that if I be not here when you return, after you have driven Gustavus back to the Baltic, you will know. 'Tis the fate of princesses who cannot control their own destinies." She had stopped in her walk as if to say a word or two before dismissing him.

"I would I were to be nearer Vienna than Magdeburg!" said Nigel. "But I have promised. And your Highness is not an Infanta of Spain to be bartered here or there for an article in a treaty."

"So you think!" she said, evidently pleased. "But we women are all alike in one thing, we are all fatalists, like the Grand Turk."

"I have been very desirous of asking your Highness a question," said Nigel, drawing the little dagger from his belt and holding it so that she could see the hilt. "Whose arms are those?"

"Habsburg," she said. "How came you by it?"

"In Magdeburg a lady tried to stab me with it."

As her fingers closed round the hilt Nigel seemed to see the hand again just as he saw it and grasped it at Magdeburg.

"I wonder whether it was my cousin Ottilie von Thüringen," she said. "She is suspected of strong sympathies for the Lutherans."

"Does she resemble your Highness in person?"

"Yes! She did as a girl! There is a coldness between the families and we do not meet as we used. Some say she is singularly like me. Her mother was sister to mine! I remember myself giving her this dagger for a

gift. 'Tis very strange it should come into your hands and your eyes say that you wish it back in your own keeping. Colonel Nigel! I shall be jealous if you love my cousin Otilie! It is the way of princesses!"

Her eyes fastened upon Nigel's: and his, fighting this uneven battle, drooped.

"I do not know if I love her! But I love none other! And then she is not a princess!"

"And one does not love the stars!" she interposed, rather with a touch of malice. "So you can worship but not love me, Colonel Nigel!"

"What can I say, your Highness? I must be true at all costs!"

A mist came over her fine eyes. She gave him her hand. This time he bowed and kissed it.

With a quick movement she turned, walked into the shadows, and he saw no more of her that night nor till he departed for his journey.

CHAPTER XVIII.

NIGEL'S INSTRUCTIONS, WRITTEN AND UNWRITTEN.

It is not too much to say that the Emperor Ferdinand and the Jesuits, which may be taken to include the Duke of Bavaria, were intoxicated by the fall of Magdeburg. Ferdinand was bent on carrying out his Edict, bent on restoring to the Church of Rome its ancient possessions, bent on levelling the edifice of Protestantism till not one stone should be left in company with another, as witness that within the bounds of the empire there had once been such a heresy as Lutheranism, or such another heresy as Calvinism. Rather a tractless desert, which, for lack of a better name, he could call a Catholic state, than well-cultivated provinces, studded thickly with prosperous towns and cities, wherein men and women worshipped their Maker after any other fashion than his own. It was a dream of fanaticism.

Once the Emperor had deemed that he was within reach of his desires, when Wallenstein and his army had traversed the land driving the forces of Protestantism before him, not all Protestantism, mark you, but all that had courage enough to show an armed front in Germany. And the Diet of Ratisbon had said, "Your Majesty must dismiss Wallenstein." The Jesuits had been foremost, for they had weighed Wallenstein and found him wanting

in their own kind of strenuousness. Reluctantly the Emperor had listened and agreed to let him go.

Gustavus had arisen. "Another little enemy," said Ferdinand, still full of the sensation of power that had crept into his heart with the aggrandisement of Wallenstein's army. Gustavus established himself in Mecklenburg and in Pomerania. "It is no great matter," said the Emperor. "Let our General Tilly and your General Pappenheim, Duke Maximilian, go on with their work and enforce the Edict. Brandenburg lies between Gustavus and Magdeburg, and George William is no fire-eater. He will stand by the Empire. Saxony, broad and rich in cities and men, lies next in his path, and John George is, Protestant though he be, a staunch Elector of the Empire. Let Tilly and Pappenheim go onward, maugre the threats of these northern migrants. We have seen Christian of Denmark driven back to his flat lands. So shall we see Gustavus." And lo! Tilly and Pappenheim took Magdeburg, and, whether they could help it or not, the city was burned and twenty thousand of its citizens died the death of the heretic: and the bruit of it had sent a shudder through all Protestant Germany. Who indeed should stand at the last day against the arms of the Empire?

"And all without your vaunted Wallenstein!" said Duke Maximilian. They set it down to impotence on the part of Gustavus.

The Emperor Ferdinand was not indisposed to show some other parts of Germany that Vienna was active, keeping them in mind, and he was not altogether sure of Hesse Cassel and its Landgrave. He did not wish to send his new regiment to join Tilly by the straight path through Saxony, because Saxony might take umbrage. It would help to preach submission if it took the road through Hesse Cassel and came by the north side of the mountains into the south of Hanover, and got into sight of Gustavus

from the west bank of the Elbe, it being presumed that the Swedish king was upon the other side, and came up stream to Tilly.

This time Nigel had no despatches to carry. The Grand Duke Lothar had summoned him to read in his presence the instructions of the Emperor, which he was to impart to Major Hildebrand von Hohendorf. The only papers he was furnished with were general authorities to quarter his troops where he thought it expedient. Money was given him, but not in such abundance as to cumber his march. Last of all, he was bidden to Father Lamormain's apartments.

The priest received him with the urbanity that sat so well upon him, and bade him be seated.

"I trust that your visit to Vienna has been a pleasant and a profitable one!" he said.

"Both the one and the other beyond all expectations!" said Nigel heartily.

"You are entering upon a perilous adventure," said the priest. "But the Emperor and his councillors have great hopes that you will acquit yourself successfully. Your journey is a long one, and you will pass through many states, towns, bishoprics, and it depends upon yourself what speed you make. I do not doubt but that your zeal will conduct you to our armies. But the Emperor desires that you should note with care the disposition and affection of each district to his rule, so that he may know on whom to count for support or enmity. More than that, it is suspected here that the Duke of Friedland has intelligence with many princes and magistrates, even with Gustavus of Sweden."

"Impossible, Father!" the young man interposed with a flush of indignation. "Wallenstein a traitor!"

Father Lamormain made a little movement with his hands.

"I do not say treasonable! We live in times when we find it as difficult to say what is honour as Pilate found it hard to say what was truth. Besides, Wallenstein, being a private gentleman holding no office, may if he so chooses write letters even to Gustavus about . . . shall we say butterflies, or forestry, or a thousand subjects."

"But with the open enemy of the Emperor!" protested Nigel.

The priest maintained his suavity.

"Injudicious, let us say, if it be true! It is suspected. Now if you should in your journeying intercept any of his messengers, the Emperor's service demands that you should possess yourself of his letters and hand them to the next regular priest you meet for transmission to the Emperor."

At the first grasp of the proposal Nigel was inclined to hesitate. But at the second he saw that there was nothing essentially unbecoming in it. He was in the service of the Emperor, and the Emperor's enemies avowed or secret must be his. There could be no division of allegiance. Besides, it was too impossible.

Father Lamormain watched his face, saw the hesitation, and drew forth a written order, signed by the Emperor himself, to seize the person of any messenger he would who carried letters, examine him, and send unbroken to the Emperor any letters he might seize.

Nigel read it and nodded.

"I understand, Father. It is for the safety of the Empire!"

"And Holy Church!" added the priest. "Your responsibility ceases when you report yourself to Count Tilly."

Nigel devoutly hoped that he would reach Tilly in the shortest possible space of time. Fighting was one thing. In so far as one did not get shot oneself or maimed, it

was an impersonal thing. Provided one did not have too much of it, it was exciting and almost enjoyable; besides that, it was the exercise of an old and honourable profession. But stopping messengers on the highroad, when there was no chance of reprisals on their part, questioning them at point of pistol, or rifling their holsters, seemed to be the work of a lower order entailing a certain stain upon him who performed it.

"I would ask you a question, Father. Why have I been chosen for this work?"

The priest smiled.

"For your knowledge of your craft the Archduke Lothar vouches. For your being a good Catholic the Church vouches. And that you are of the Scottish nation is good pledge that you will have no personal end to serve in Germany but your own advancement. To you Saxony is Saxony, Bavaria, Bavaria, but they mean nothing. You have taken service with the Emperor, and him only will you serve. So long as you serve the Emperor with a single eye you will succeed. The blessing of Heaven will follow you. The higher you climb, the more difficult the path will be. But only obey!"

The openness of the priest's avowal and his fatherly manner, almost a benediction in itself, won upon Nigel to a great degree, so that his suspicions of the Jesuits and their ways were almost, if not quite, laid to rest.

"To obey comes easy to the soldier, Father! But it does not make some duties less irksome."

"Ah! There I disagree with you," said the priest. "The rule of my order is obedience. The patience, the skill demanded of us, the interest involved in carrying out the task to a complete and successful issue beyond the possibility of doubt, remove all that you call irksomeness. Strive after our conception of obedience and all else becomes easy to you."

"But in your case," said Nigel, "there is no tie of blood that binds you. You admit neither father nor mother. The Church and your order stand in their stead."

"That is true! The member of the brotherhood of Jesus reckons no human relationship as having any meaning in his regard, and being free he moves safely to his instructed purpose. There is but one human passion which can be a source of danger to you. You are young. You may love. At present no danger threatens. Am I right?"

Nigel answered tersely enough.

"No woman claims me. I claim no woman!"

And his answer was as sincere as it appeared to be to Father Lamormain. For if his thoughts had often turned towards the lost Otilie, and his admiration been roused by the Archduchess Stephanie, the unknown distance of the one and the exalted rank of the other had stayed the fire, as trenches widely dug will upon a burning heath.

Nigel was sensible of the pervading influence of the priest. He had passed the stage at which he had silently questioned his instructions, nor did he think it strange that the confessor of the Emperor should have been the channel of their conveyance: for by this time from one and another he had realised the peculiarly close leaning that the Emperor had towards the Church and towards its regular priests. He, however, did not recognise that one purpose of the interview was that Father Lamormain should make the further acquaintance with the instrument the Emperor and himself proposed to use.

On the whole, Father Lamormain was well pleased, and satisfied on the main head that Nigel was no creature of Wallenstein, though as a soldier he revered his old commander. For any further work beyond the present, time would show if this Scottish gentleman might become a more confidential agent of the order.

On the morrow Nigel set forth from Vienna with his three hundred "Rough-riders," and if, horses and men, they presented an uncouth and unfinished appearance, they also had a certain aspect of the formidable that boded ill for any obstacle they might encounter.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE GUESTS OF THE ABBOT OF FULDA.

OF the earlier marches of Colonel Nigel Charteris it is not needful to say anything. For the first day brought them across the plains to Budweiss, where a strong garrison of the Emperor's troops lay, and the next to the Bohmerwald, crossing which they came into Bavaria, and so on the evening of the fourth day made Nuremburg. Bavaria being a country ruled by that masterful Duke Maximilian, who was a pupil of the Jesuits, though of a far more flexible mind than his cousin Ferdinand, was a stronghold of Catholicism, and, beyond a few natural grumbles at having to find quarters and food for so undesirable-looking a regiment, placed no obstacles in their way.

Nuremburg certainly showed a sullenness of the populace which seemed to indicate that below the surface there was a strong Protestant feeling, despite Maximilian's orthodoxy, but to Nigel it mattered little. His march next led him to Bamberg, a town entirely dominated by a Catholic Bishop, and a hostelry on the "Priestlane" to the Rhine, as the chain of Bishoprics was called by the untaught lewd of the Protestants. The next stage was Fulda, the seat of the Abbot of St Boniface, across the Bavarian border, and before him lay on one side the westernmost

strip of the Thüringian forest, and on the other the State of Hesse Cassel.

Now and again in Bavaria Nigel heard news of the army that was with Pappenheim and Tilly. He learned that no action had been fought, that the Elector of Saxony was still maintaining a neutrality, though he had gathered large numbers of troops. Of Gustavus he learned nothing. Evidently he was still in Pomerania. Nigel anticipated a peaceful march through the territories he had yet to traverse, albeit they were territories still Protestant in the main.

The Abbot of Fulda was the chief of all the abbots of the Empire. His territory extended twenty miles to the north and fifteen from east to west. It was for the most part a fertile plain of great cultivation lying between two ranges of hills which met at the northmost angle of a rough triangle. Fulda itself was in the south of the domain and near the Bavarian border. For forty years or more the Abbots of Fulda had kept Lutheranism at bay with as much zeal as the Emperor himself, while Hesse Cassel and Thüringia, the neighbouring states, had as sedulously fostered the heresy.

Nigel and his men readily gained entry to the town, and were surprised, as they rode through, at the palace of the Abbot and the buildings inhabited by his dependants and officers as well as those of the abbey itself, where the monks continued to extol, if not to emulate, the holiness of St Boniface, whose bones lay beneath the altar in the chapel beneath the choir of the cathedral. The town reflected in its shops and dwellings as well as in the dress of its inhabitants the wealth and prosperity of the Abbot, for the shrine of St Boniface brought numerous pilgrims, and the long and orderly rule of the Church for long generations over the domains had enabled the abbey to accumulate a considerable treasure. Nor were evidences

lacking that the Abbot was alive to the scriptural advice about the strong man armed keeping his goods in peace. For the Abbot commanded a goodly assemblage of lay brothers, who acted as his fighting force, for reprisals or for defence.

The object of their visit being explained to the chief officer of the abbey, quarters were assigned to the men and horses in the outlying portions, while Nigel and Hildebrand were received with much ceremony into the palace of the Prince-Abbot himself, and treated with every courtesy as the representatives of the Emperor.

The Abbot loved good cheer, and those who sat at meat with him had no cause to complain of famine or of drought, nor was he himself sparing.

Beside the two soldiers were two of the Abbot's principal officers, and another gentleman, like the soldiers, a sojourner in the territories of Fulda. The high cheek-bones and small dark eyes, the swarthy gipsy-like complexion, all denoted an Eastern birthplace.

The Abbot presented the newcomers to him and named him as the Count von Teschen. His manners were pleasant. He was affable, but it was an affability that told nothing.

"So you were at Magdeburg!" said the Abbot. "A grave blunder!"

Nigel looked questioningly.

"Not on your part, colonel! Nor for that matter on Tilly's. But the Jesuits!"

"But Magdeburg had flouted the Edict!" opposed Nigel.

"Magdeburg was at fault too!" smiled the Abbot. "The Emperor is a good Catholic. So am I, I trust. But the Emperor is too Spanish in his Catholicism. Lutheranism was a kind of quartan fever, a theologic plague, a wen into which all manner of foul humours

of discontent drained till it burst. It should have been allowed to exhaust itself. What did my predecessors do? They sat fast. They rewarded their good faithful Catholics. They made no wholesale persecution of the heretics, of whom there were a few. But the heretics found out that the true faith paid them better. Here and there one was quietly deprived of his farm or of our custom. Lutheranism grew stale, as all these violent uprisings must. The old order continued. Little by little, when those tinged with heresy saw that we were not to be moved, they came back."

"They were long-headed men, the Abbots of Fulda! Now Fulda trades with Hesse Cassel and with Thuringia, which are both Lutheran. We exchange our cattle and our wine and leather for their goods or their money, and do not find fault because either smells of Lutheranism."

"It sounds reasonable!" said the Count von Teschen.

"Edicts are all very well," the Abbot continued, "but if edicts are going to destroy men and women and children, homesteads, workshops, trade, they are going to destroy our revenues."

"But surely," suggested Nigel, "our Father the Pope approved of the Emperor's Edict and the means he took to enforce it."

The Abbot smiled with great benignity.

"If the Grand Turk issued an edict that all his subjects should become Christians, would not the Holy Father approve? Without a doubt! But if the Grand Turk applied to His Holiness for a million of gold crowns to assist him in his task of conversion?"

"I wager," said Hildebrand, "His Holiness would not subscribe a single rix-dollar!"

"It would be a pious aspiration! And so was our Pope's. They call him Pope Lutheranus. He was not willing to discourage the Emperor Ferdinand in his desires to

restore to the church what the church had lost, but he has not shown himself willing to contribute out of the treasure of Rome to set armies marching hither and thither over the peaceful lands of Germany to enforce his aspiration. Let well alone!"

"The Duke of Friedland allowed himself to be dismissed," said the Count von Teschen, "because he saw that it was the Emperor's desire to make him the instrument of oppression to the Protestants."

Nigel's ears pricked up. Who was this that spoke so intimately of Wallenstein's mind?

"Doubtless he saw also," said the Abbot, "that the ideas of the Emperor would draw together all the Protestant powers. It is coming to that. Even my neighbour the Landgrave of Hesse Cassel is but now on his way, if he has not already started, to join Gustavus."

"Indeed!" said Count von Teschen. There was that in his look and tone which suggested to Nigel that it was news to him, and unwelcome news.

"Moreover, my neighbours of Thüringia are in a ferment and have raised up at least a regiment to march into Saxony."

"To what end?" said Nigel. "It is thought the Elector, John George, is too well affected to the Emperor."

"John George is by nature peaceful! But he is gathering an army. And if the Emperor were as politic as he is a good Catholic he would say to John George, 'Come! Let us talk no more about edicts. Let us drive out the Swedes.' But he cannot. He is too headstrong, and too sure of John George. And John George has his people to consider. Do you think Magdeburg has softened *them*? Has not every village had its separate tale, and, as for Thüringia, there is a preacher called Pastor Rad, who has

painted the fall of Magdeburg from one end of the forest to the other in the colours of Sodom and Gomorrah. Beware how you and your troops ride through the forest. Just now the sight of a casque or a gorget would madden the peasantry till not one trooper of your regiment would remain to ride his horse."

Nigel was not ungrateful to the Abbot for his warning, though he suspected the dignitary of an inclination to exaggerate. He was no coward, but he had seen enough of the Forest to know its solitudes of trees, the deep beds of leaves that lay in the hollows, undisturbed from year to year, till those of ten years ago had become thick black soft earth in which a man's body might lie and moulder silently and surely till the bones parted company. In the Forest a shrewd bolt from an old cross-bow, an opportune thrust of pike from behind a tree, a stone well dropped from a bough, might each and all thin his ranks and no enemy be seen.

But these gruesome forebodings were set aside by something the genial and talkative host was saying to Count von Teschen.

"Prague! I have never journeyed thither! They say the Duke of Friedland has a goodly dwelling." He looked round complacently. "Our own is not amiss seeing what a patchwork the ages and my predecessors have made of it. Is the Duke's greater?"

"It is in a great park!" said Count von Teschen. There are six gates to its outer walls, and he has twenty gentlemen of birth serving him as if he were the King of France. The servants and horsemen are numberless, and his riches make the whole expense appear but a tithe of them.

"And how does he spend his time?"

"You have heard of his astrologer?"

"Has he an astrologer of his own?"

"Aye! One Master Seni! 'Tis not the only one, for I have heard of another, Master Pietro Bramante, who travels up and down and visits him at times."

"And what do they that a man cannot do for himself?"

"I know not! All they do they do in secret. But 'tis said they both watch the stars for signs."

"As Cæsar watched the entrails of the sacrifice for signs!" said the Abbot with a laugh. "But I wager that Don Cæsar could always find the auspices propitious, if his own plans were ripe."

This caustic comment did not seem to please Count von Teschen, for he said nothing but smiled an unpleasant smile that showed his fine white teeth.

"You may tell the Duke that I was much gratified by his gift. That antique mitre of old goldsmith's work and the rochet will be famous additions to our Abbey's treasure-house, and that which he has sent me of a more personal kind is very precious to an old man who finds much of his enjoyment in his toys."

Count von Teschen expressed his thanks for the Abbot's appreciation and promised deliverance of the message.

The Abbot, on his part, promised to show them the treasures of St Boniface on the morrow, and after a little while of further talk the guests were shown with all ceremony to their bedchambers.

Nigel was nothing loth. But he had no sooner found his couch than he began to con over this Count von Teschen. That he was an emissary of Wallenstein was plain: but that a rich nobleman should send presents appropriate in character to a rich prelate had nothing suspicious in it. If Wallenstein had lost favour and power mainly through the loss of the support of the great Catholic electors, the Bishops of Mainz, Cologne, and Treves, it was not so wonderful that he should by indirect

methods attempt to curry favour with a man like the Abbot of Fulda, who was almost the equal of the great Prince-Bishops, and would share their politics and their fortunes. But was this *all* the task of the emissary? Was it not possibly a cover to his real purpose, an end in itself, but only a minor one? If it were so, how was Nigel on the Abbot's own friendly territory to bid Count von Teschen stand and deliver, backed though he was by three hundred indifferent horsemen, many of whom were Count von Teschen's own countrymen? It is to be feared that Nigel's last prayers before sleep came were not for the salvation of Father Lamormain.

The next morning Nigel and Hildebrand met the Abbot, who had with him Count von Teschen, at the hour of nine, and made the round of the Cathedral and the treasure-house and the principal apartments of the palace and the abbey, which occupied them well till the hour of dinner, when they were again treated with sumptuous liberality. The meal over, Count von Teschen took his leave, and Nigel was unable to see him depart: but for this he had taken measures. The Abbot seemed very willing to detain the others, and asked particularly to see the muster of the troops and an exercise or two, for his tastes seemed to lie strongly towards secular matters. Nigel could do no less than gratify him, and though he himself was quite aware that his men were far from showing the discipline and skill of the veteran troops he had once led, the display pleased his host, and occupied a good deal of time.

His first question of Sergeant Blick was as to the direction taken by the Count. When he learned that it was on towards the borders of Hesse Cassel he was possessed by eagerness to set off, which, however, he had to restrain till he could take decent leave of the prelate.

"You have a good many Bohemians in your ranks, colonel!" said the Abbot.

It was significant that the Abbot of St Boniface could put two and two together.

"Aye," said Nigel to himself, "corbies dinna pick oot corbies' een!"

CHAPTER XX.

CASTING OUT A DEVIL.

It was thus two hours past noon when Nigel and his men rode out of the north gate of Fulda, and took the road that leads along the left bank of the river Fulda, which steadily pursues its way till it finds an opening in Taunus and so breaks into Hesse Cassel. Whether Count von Teschen had taken that road, or returned, seemed of little moment, for he had at least two hours' start, and as he had but a single man-servant, and both of them were well mounted, pursuit promised little result; for the speed of Nigel's command was perforce the speed of the worst horse. Moreover, as they were approaching a country of doubtful friendliness, it was wiser to approach it in good order and condition than upon horses blown with haste.

At the frontier of Hesse was a small military post the captain of which challenged their further passage.

Nigel made a civil reply that he was commanding a regiment of the Emperor's horse and purposed to ride through Hesse Cassel into Lower Saxony. The captain requested that he would stay his march till the wishes of the Landgrave could be ascertained. To this Nigel made the firm answer that he was unable to wait for such permission, the more so that the Emperor was not

at war with Hesse but with Sweden. The captain told him that he passed at his own peril, and called in his handful of men. Nigel rode on to Hersfeld. Such of the inhabitants that he met or overtook preserved a sullen demeanour, which did not savour of anything but hostility. Perhaps they regarded him and his men as the woeful harbingers of great armies, and few of them, indeed, made any guess as to the master he served, being disquieted at the uncouth aspect of the strangers.

But at Hersfeld he found something more than sullenness. For outside the gates on the town's common was drawn up a considerable body of well-armed infantry, and the numerous pennons showed that here was a muster camp. Two regiments were disposed in battle array in the dense battalion formation usual with all armies but that of Gustavus. A little in front of these was a group of richly-dressed officers, and in the middle one of high rank.

Nigel halted his men and rode forward with Hildebrand till he came within saluting distance, when, after a cold acknowledgment, the general commanding the Hessians motioned him to come forward.

Nigel advanced a few steps and reined in his horse.

"Who are you?" was the curt inquiry.

"Colonel Nigel Charteris of the Imperial Service, with my regiment of horse. I am leading them through the territories of Hesse Cassel to join Count Tilly."

"By whose authority?"

"The Emperor's, and with the goodwill of the princes his allies!"

"His Majesty takes strange measures to preserve their goodwill, sir. I am William of Hesse! These are my territories, not the Emperor's."

"Your Highness will surely of grace accord us a day's journey through your dominions, and such little provender

as we pay for. It is a peaceful errand so far as your Highness is concerned."

"Then you should have stayed at the frontier till my guards had asked my will."

"I crave pardon, your Highness. I was told in Fulda that your Highness had set out on a journey; and I might have waited an ill-convenient time."

"It is possible, colonel. You might have gone other ways."

"The Emperor would doubtless be surprised to hear that the Landgrave of Hesse Cassel was unwilling to give his men passage. But if it be denied to them, I have no instructions to make war."

"'Tis just as well!" said the Landgrave with a grim smile on his thick lips. "We have that about us that would stop you. You will go hence, if you so choose, across the river into Thuringia, and make what way you can. I am not ruler there. But further passage through Hesse you cannot have."

Nigel showed no outward perturbation. He took one level, leisurely survey of the officers of the Landgrave, saluted, and said—

"Adieu, your Highness! It will please the Emperor to know that the hospitality, which is denied to him, is accorded to the Duke of Friedland."

The point of this remark lay in this, that Count von Teschen was seated on horseback among the suite of the Landgrave.

"One does not inquire into the quality of the merchant, but into the goodness of his wares!" was the quick reply. For all his sternness the Landgrave looked into Nigel's eyes with a half smile, and made a little motion of farewell with gauntleted hand. He was a man and knew a man.

Nigel and Hildebrand bade their regiment of rough-

riders turn about and make for the river bank. The advance-guard was bidden to stop wherever the river should be fordable. Then they planned to cross into Thuringia and march north by the way of Erfurt, and thence to the camp of Gustavus.

The *contretemps* at Hersfeld was a surprise to both of them. Nor was it to be explained by the presence of Count von Teschen. It was plain that the Landgrave was about to take up arms against the Emperor, and that the Emperor was ill-informed as to the real state of matters in the Protestant States, of which Hesse Cassel was one of the smallest.

As to Wallenstein, Nigel against his own inclination was beginning to have doubts of his loyalty. Father Lamormain had more than hinted them. The Landgrave's irony about the merchant and his merchandise showed that at the opposite poles of policy and belief similar ideas were current. And Nigel was honestly grieved. But his path at all events was plain. He was for the Emperor.

So having come to the ford he set his horse at the water, and though it reached his stirrups and ran swiftly, he made light of it. By the fall of evening they had reached the hamlet of Salzungen and bivouacked by the river Werra.

Water and green grass ripening into long hay were there in plenty, and Nigel had learned in the school of Wallenstein sufficient of the art of exacting creature-comforts for the men. It was merely an outskirts of the forest land, gently undulating from the hamlet church down to the river; and across the river farther down, where a wooden bridge spanned it, the road wound into gentle rising lands, behind which rose steeper pine-covered hills, and there was a great expanse of sky and comparatively open country. There was no chance of a surprise here, and except from equal numbers of

cavalry, a thing unlikely to expect, there was nothing to fear.

At the ford near Hersfeld he had left a vedette of three picked men to watch and capture any one that crossed during the next five or six hours. There was still a hope that it might be the Count von Teschen. And if his path lay in another direction, it might be some messenger to rouse the opposition of the people of the forest.

At midnight the vedette came in and reported that no one had crossed.

When the vedette came Nigel roused himself to hear their report, bade them take the refreshment provided for them, and go to sleep. The first sentinels had been relieved, and all was quiet save for the sound of horses tearing the rich grass as they took fresh mouthfuls, or the chant of some still unsated grasshoppers. He was soon asleep again.

But not so heavily as before. The couch of hay on which he lay in an open shed did not, once his sleep was broken, prove quite so soft and alluring as it had three hours before. And at two o'clock, which sounded from the nearest steeple, he found himself cold and wakeful. Then from the main street of the hamlet his ear caught the sound of horse's hoofs, not of a horse being ridden but led. One horse! Two horses! It might be some early villager; or, again, it might be Count von Teschen.

Nigel got up, wrapped in his cloak as he was, went out and summoned the sentry who was on guard beside the hut. Taking the man's musket himself, he bade him go and see who the horsemen were, and himself walked to and fro in the cold air, musket on arm. Then after a few steps he stood still, for he had heard a low call. It was a familiar one, the call of the Bohemian to his horse. Some wakeful trooper might have uttered it in pure negligence. But it was repeated. And then from another

direction, it was not easy to tell which, it was answered. Nigel was alert now, wondering what this might mean. Still dark, he had nothing but his ears to trust to, but down among the lines he thought he heard movements. So he roused the two nearest men, and sending one away in the direction of the noise he bade the other be on the alert. Then he resumed his place, appearing to sleep on his post but in reality watching with ears and eyes.

Two forms began to make themselves apparent, wriggling and crouching along the ground in between the sleeping troopers, mere shapes, but moving, and moving towards the hut. Of a sudden one sprang at him, knife in hand, to feel the butt of the sentry's musket hit him one tremendous blow beneath the chin and then nothing more upon earth. The other who made straight into the hut was faced at the opening by a trooper, who, firing his musket point-blank, blew half the man's face away, and in doing so roused the camp.

"Seize all the Bohemians!" was the next order. But quickly as it was carried out in the almost total darkness, the confusion, the protests, the excitement among the horses, which threatened to stampede, all contributed to the partial success of the plot. For some twenty-five or thirty men galloped in wild disorder across the grasslands and gained the wooded bridge before they could be stopped, and for the present it was hopeless to pursue. The sentry was found by the roadside leading to the village, stunned by a blow from a pistol butt.

Nigel, except for Hildebrand, kept his own counsel. But at dawn, as soon as the troopers had broken their fast and horses were fed and watered, he made a close inquiry, released such of the Bohemians as seemed to have kept quiet, distributed them by twos and threes through the other troops, and the rest, about a dozen in all, he

deprived of their arms and made them ride in the middle of the regiment, scowling and disconsolate.

So Count von Teschen had scored his first point, and the second point. But Nigel was determined not to let him get too far ahead, to husband his horses with all the skill he could command, and follow his own road to Erfurt. If he could get even with von Teschen on the way so much the better.

It was a summer morning. Not a few of the village folk came out to look at the regiment from a respectful distance. And as Nigel and Hildebrand rode over the little bridge whence they could see in either direction the little river peacefully meandering, the line of tiny trees along its banks, the shimmering haze over the meadows, and heard the church bell summoning the faithful to early mass, all the world seemed at peace. Over the low hill to another hamlet called Schweina, where they got a stirrup-cup, and then the road, still mounting, wound by an ascent that tried the horses towards the castle of Altenstein, which was nearly the highest point of the range of hills they had to cross, peering out of the thick woods. As yet they had seen no sign of the Count von Teschen. A short halt to breathe the horses and then onward again, and after a short farther ascent they found on the ridge of the range a fair road, wooded to the left, and bounded on the right by grasslands which sloped down to the valley, a world of greenery beneath a canopy of the bluest sky. A mile further on, to avoid a long detour, they had to clamber by a rough path over a spur of the woody hill before meeting the road again, and here they became aware they were not the only wayfarers, for, as Nigel was almost out of the woodland shade, he heard the murmur of many voices and the articulate sound of one strong resonant voice.

Nigel passed the word to halt, while he looked upon the business that was forward, and to do that the better he forced his horse through the undergrowth some few dozen yards farther along. Upon a waggon, from which the horses had been taken, stood Pastor Rad.

At first Nigel saw vaguely a great multitude, and his first thought was that this was an assemblage of the Lutherans for worship in a place convenient to the many scattered hamlets. Then as his horse stood more steadily and he could choose his own window in the leaves, he saw that a great many of them were men, and that they were armed in some measure; and, thirdly, he noticed that whatever the ultimate business might be, that which was being transacted was a sort of trial.

There was Pastor Rad standing in an ox-waggon, his long yellow hair partly matted on his brow and partly hanging in disorder, for he was manifestly very hot. Down below, facing him, sat a girl, her hair flowing down to her waist, in a plain dusky blue robe. She was manifestly being talked at, preached at, the object of public ignominy. In a ring round her at a little distance sat two rows of grim-faced elders, or whatever functionaries corresponded to that body in the Lutheran community.

"Come forth, Satan!" bellowed Pastor Rad, so that it reached even to the ears of Nigel and Hildebrand.

And all the ring of elders fell forthwith upon their knees and cried with a loud voice, "Come forth, Satan!"

The girl involuntarily put her hands to her ears because of the clamour.

"What in the name of heaven are they about?" Nigel asked.

"'Tis an exorcising. The girl has an evil spirit!" said Hildebrand, crossing himself. "'Tis none of our business! Let us get on!"

But the girl wept and stood up crying aloud for a deliverer. She evidently dreaded the next step of the exorcisers. And with good reason, for Pastor Rad issued some brief directions and two men seized the girl, and, thrusting her hands between the rails of the waggon, were proceeding to bind them; another stood forward with a whip of many thongs.

"God condemn the Lutherans!" said Hildebrand, and spat upon the ground. "They are going to whip the devil out of her."

Once more the girl tried to wrench herself free, and in doing so turned her face, throwing back her flowing hair as she did so, in such wise that Nigel got a glimpse of it.

"By God's Son!" Nigel exclaimed, with a burst of passionate indignation that almost startled Hildebrand. "Go back! lead the men into the open, halt them in three lines and await my order! Tschk!"

Bowing his head and urging his horse he broke through the saplings and galloped to the girl's side.

It needed but his brief "Loose her!" to make her torturers undo the clumsy fastening they had begun, and "Elsbeth Reinheit!" for her to fling her arms around his saddle-peak.

"Take me away! Save me! Save me! Captain!"

Nigel unclasped her arms and bade her once more sit down upon the low bench. "Fear no more, maiden!" he added with such decision in his voice as poured fresh courage into her. Then he faced sternly up at the Pastor and asked him—

"What have you against this maiden?"

But the Pastor, full to overflowing with spiritual drunkenness, shouted—

"The Lord hath delivered into our hands her paramour also! Behold him that sinned with the damsel. Now

shall the lying devil come out of her and she shall confess!"

"What say you?" was Nigel's response, hurled at the minister in a voice that spoke of his indignation.

"That you, Captain of the host of the Evil One, did'st lie with the damsel at Magdeburg! Deny it not!"

Before the Pastor knew what he did, Nigel had leaned over in his stirrups and, seizing him by the raiment, tumbled him to the ground and struck him two shrewd blows with the flat of his sword, which completed his confusion.

The men of the assembly sprang up, and with one accord were making for the bold intruder, but the immediate appearance of Hildebrand and his men caused every one to stand stark still.

"Know all men!" shouted Nigel in the temporary silence, "this maiden, Elspeth Reinheit, is as pure as snow. Your Pastor lies foully when he says other. It is true she succoured me when I was in sore need in Magdeburg. But do not your Scriptures say—'If thine enemy hunger, feed him. If he thirst, give him drink'? This did she, and for this I spared not only her life, but the life of her slanderer, Pastor Rad. Is this true, maiden?"

"Before God, it is true!" said Elspeth.

"Nevertheless, I leave her not here to your ruthlessness and your religion! Maiden!"

She sprang up at the word! Nigel lifted her upon his saddle, and giving his horse the spur, bore her to the regiment, who, understanding nothing of what had gone before, manifested a jovial indifference not unmingled later with some rough jokes, which would perhaps have put Nigel to the blush. For a woman, especially a

woman in her youth, not ill-looking, was the ordained prey of the soldier of fortune, who having abducted her in one hour, as willingly dropped her in the next to patch up her life and the rags of her honour as she would.

CHAPTER XXI.

INTO THE FOREST'S HEART.

BEFORE Elspeth Reinheit was aware of the providential character of the deliverance from her persecutors, she found herself descending the familiar, tortuous, narrow valley of the Erbstrom, along which the houses of the village of Ruhla are strung for fully a couple of miles. After a stony descent the regiment reached a tolerable inn, wherein Nigel could gain speech in something like connected fashion with the girl.

It seemed that from the day that Nigel burst into the house at Magdeburg Pastor Rad had conceived a violent jealousy in regard to Elspeth, to whom previously he had paid such attentions as indicated a project of marriage. Elspeth had till that time received his attentions with a kind of dutiful acquiescence; but as from that time his manner towards her changed into one of sullen suspicion, out of which arose interminable inquiries as to her relations with the Scottish captain of musketeers, so her mood of acquiescence had changed also into one of complete indifference, not altogether free from a little feminine spite. Unable to get any definite confession from her which would have condemned her, the minister had brooded over his own fancied wrongs along with the very real wrongs done to his fellow Lutherans at Magde-

burg, and had finally concluded that she was possessed by a lying devil, who took pleasure in defeating him. This was a blow to his spiritual pride, and he had arranged to bring the matter to the test of a public discipline. To what lengths he might have gone in his extraordinary fury, supported as he was by the general renown he was just then enjoying as a prophet of Protestantism, it was impossible to say. He was a fanatic, and a genuine believer in his own fanaticism, spurred on by a bitter residuum of admiration and desire for the maiden he had once fully intended to marry. As for the congregations he had summoned from every hamlet, little and big, for miles round, it was sufficient for them to have heard the bruit of the possession to believe it implicitly. Even the very lawyers believed in such things, and unlearned persons were not prone to doubt what lawyers and clergy unitedly agreed was so. That she was a girl of the richer class of farmers, and therefore above most of themselves in social consideration, was in itself an inducement to believe ill of her. They had come to the assembly as to a holiday, with their wives and provisions, their pipes and tabors. There was to be a general muster afterwards of a military character, for had they not promised to raise a corps in aid of John George the Elector of Saxony, who was on the eve of rebellion against the Emperor?

The question Nigel now put to Elspeth was as to her next destination. Her home was a little to the north of Eisenach, but her father was a man who concerned himself more to stand well in the eyes of his neighbours, and especially those who bought and sold with him, than one to stand up starkly for his daughter's good name and safety. He had made a protest of sorts against her being haled before the congregations on such a charge, but he had not stood out long before the onslaught of Pastor

Rad and some of the lay brethren. What had happened before might happen again. Elspeth felt no surety in being restored at present to the parental homestead.

"Have you no more powerful friends who could give you refuge till Pastor Rad grows tired of his folly?"

"There is the Lady Otilie of Thüringen!" said Elspeth. "I know not where we may find her just now. She comes and goes like the forest deer. She is sometimes at the Wartburg! If she were there, the Landgravine would take me in, and Pastor Rad would never lay hands on me."

A strange eager light came into Nigel's face as the name of the mysterious Otilie fell innocently and naturally from the girl's lips.

"Who is she, this Lady Otilie?" he asked in a tone of calculated indifference. "Is she of the Landgrave's family?"

Elspeth opened her own blue eyes more widely, and considered Nigel's face with a calm gaze as she replied—

"She may be of their kin. I do not know. She is possessed of influence with them, and they treat her with much honour."

They made plans together, for Elspeth knew every path through the forest, and after an hour or so Nigel gave orders to mount again. Sergeant Blick had improvised a pillion, and Elspeth was mounted this time behind a solid German trooper, to whose belt she held tightly. She rode a few paces behind Nigel, who was busy for a mile or two unfolding to Hildebrand the inner history of the incident, and his own plans.

So they rode on to a spot where a ridge of high open ground divides the thick forest valleys leading northwards from the one by which they had come. It is called Hohe Sonne. Here Hildebrand assumed command of the regiment, and was to lead them to the right by

the road called Weinstrasse and halt them at the edge of the forest, two miles to the east of the town of Eisenach, while Nigel with Sergeant Blick and four trustworthy troopers should make their way on foot with Elspeth through the Annathal to the Wartburg. By this forest path they would be under cover all the way. Their task accomplished, Nigel and his party could rejoin the regiment. In the present state of Thuringia, stirred from end to end as it evidently had been, Nigel was bent on keeping as much as possible to the open road, and not allowing his force to be entangled in any tumult in the towns.

At first the pathway led gently downwards through a wide undulating area of forest, which gradually contracted to a long sinuous ravine flanked by steep walls of rock. The sound of voices carried far along this rock-bound way in the stillness, that was broken by nothing but the light splashing of the brook and the "pink-pink" call of the birds.

Nigel and Elspeth Reinheit were far in front, for they were lighter of foot, and both eager, though from different causes. He was desirous to surrender his charge, pretty and young as she was, into safe keeping, for Nigel had never played philanderer. He was also involuntarily full of the tumult, at once a wonder to himself and a pleasure, that came over him at the thought of Ottilie von Thüringen.

Elspeth in her ingenuous way was only too glad to leave the soldiers in the rear, in order to savour the unspoken delight she felt at being alone in the forest with her deliverer, at whose noble and martial aspect she kept taking little fleeting but soul-satisfying looks. She longed with all her maidenliness, and she was as sweet and chaste as the brook that gurgled by them, to throw her arms about him and tell him that she could

love him to eternity. The affection of a thousand affectionate German girls, rippling over with endearing phrases of their love-making mother tongue, welled up to her lips, but did not pass them. Only by an effort of will did she convert them to little outbursts of thankfulness that gushed out at intervals, and after short spaces of silence, renewed themselves in other words. Even Nigel could scarcely fail to be aware of the state of her feelings, for the tenderness of her tones filled out what might be lacking in her actual declarations. Her beautiful golden hair had been gathered by her deft fingers into a coil, and surmounted rather than covered by a dainty coif; and with her clear blue eyes and pink cheeks, her supple figure, rather tall than otherwise, she was a feast for the eyes that some of the heroes of the Nibelungen Lied might well have coveted.

One question bubbled to the surface of her mingled reverie and talk.

"Noble captain, have you ever seen the Lady Otilie since we parted at Erfurt?"

Nigel was too busy with the puzzling thoughts that the question called up to apprehend any subtlety in the question. So he said—

"Once I fancied so! But it was not near enough to speak, and it was night."

"Do you long very much to see her again?" came the next question.

"I? Little one! I scarcely know! She is a mystery to me!"

"Perhaps that is why you would like to see her!" she conjectured. "Now when you have brought me to a safe place *I* shall never cease to wish to see *you* again."

Nigel smiled as he answered—

"You must have a long patience, Fräulein Elspeth, for I may never come this way again."

Elspeth was on the verge of tears.

"But what is this?" asked Nigel. "It seems to me that the rocks close in and that there is no passage, though I suppose the brook runs out by some crevice. Do we have to climb the rocks?"

"We are coming to the Dragon's Gorge. After that we shall have the wide forest again."

"We must wait till the men come up with us!" said Nigel.

"I could wait all day!" sighed the maiden, gazing at him with large eyes and then dropping her eyelids.

In a minute or two they heard the sound of hurrying feet, in another Sergeant Blick and his men came panting up as fast as they could run.

"The Bohemians!" said Blick. "Count von Teschen!" Presently the jingle and clatter of men and horses echoed along the rocky walls.

"No horses can get through the Dragon's Gorge," said Elspeth. "Come!" She led them to the rocks, and there a narrow passage disclosed itself, the width of a broad man, no more. It was as if the rocks had once been one and been split asunder by some mighty rent. The brook flowed to the opening, and the rocks' sides were covered with mosses and ferns up and up, through which there was an eternal trickle of water, and high above all were the tree-tops.

"The question is, are they pursuing us, or are they merely making for the Wartburg?" Nigel asked Sergeant Blick. Elspeth answered—

"They would never have come this way to *ride* to the Wartburg."

"Then they must never come through!" said Nigel. "Fräulein Elspeth, lead these men through to the other end! Blick, stay here with me."

Then Nigel peered out from the mouth of the rocky

passage. He espied Count von Teschen and his troop of Bohemians riding along. Then, as they in their turn made out the impossibility of going further, there was a general hubbub of voices.

Count von Teschen was inclined to turn back and seek another way, but evidently some of his ruffians were for a pursuit on foot, thinking the rock passage but a temporary obstacle. Five or six of them dismounted and throwing the reins on their horses' necks rushed forward splashing into the brook, and then one entered the Dragon's Gorge. He had no sooner peered round the first bend than he fell forward, for Blick's musket butt was heavy and the arm that swung it strong. He fell face downwards into the stream.

Another of his fellows followed eagerly, and again the butt descended and he fell on top of the other. The water continued to trickle through the ferns and mosses. And the brook flowing on carried the flowing blood onwards to Nigel's feet as he splashed forward towards the other end of the gorge.

It was a strange fortress to hold, this rift in the rocks, and yet a fortress of a kind. One man at each end could hold it. It was tortuous and it was lofty. Overhead were streaks of blue sky, alternating with patches of greenery and overhanging rocks. It would take more men than Count von Teschen had to spy down from above with the view of letting a big loose stone fall upon the heads of the defenders, for a yard to right or left for them brought invisibility. Nigel pressed on to the other end, which opened out into a wider passage a few feet in length, and then discovered a still wider glen, with sloping sides thick with trees. Two things were possible: the one to hasten forward and trust to their heels for putting the forest depths between them and the pursuers, which meant risking their lives once the Count and his followers had

made a circuit of the obstacle and possibly overtaken them, spreading out as they would be sure to do. The other was to lie in the fortress, stoutly guarding both ends, and trust to the foe giving up a hopeless task, and proceeding. The latter had this to recommend it, that darkness would fall at sunset, and the hours of this eventful day were hastening to their end. And with darkness and Elspeth they might surely expect to evade the others and make their way to the Wartburg.

Against this plan Nigel's mind suggested that Count von Teschen was quite possibly himself journeying to that same castle, carrying letters to the Landgrave, and if he reached there first, what hope could there be of a reception for Elspeth, or safety for himself, especially now that blood had been shed.

It became an immediate necessity to see what the enemy was doing. He sent one man back to support Blick, one man he posted at the farther end of the gorge, outside, as a look-out, and the other two with Elspeth stood in a little hollow just outside on a dry spot, with instructions to retire to the rocks if danger threatened. Nigel then climbed the steep ascent at the further end and made his way along the lip of the rift till he could look down upon the Count and his followers; they were all there as far as Nigel could see, irresolute. Finally they seemed to make up their minds, and one by one began to lead their horses in single file up a steep bank into the woodland. Yet not all, for six remained to guard the inlet. Very cautiously Nigel leaned over and called to Blick, whose cheery voice was heard in reply—

“Two dead. No wounded, colonel!”

CHAPTER XXII.

THE DRAGON'S GORGE.

NIGEL CHARTERIS prayed for the fall of night. Night and the forest could save him and his handful. Night and the forest would enable Elspeth to lead them to the Wartburg more swiftly than any horsemen could make their way.

Nigel prayed, but with him to pray was to labour. In a moment he was back again at the hinder end of the gorge and drew out his two men. In another moment they had spread forty yards apart, secure behind wide boles of trees on either side of the direction taken by the Count. Then a pause came. The Count and his followers rode stealthily forward. They were evidently making a flank movement, but whether of departure or of surprise, it was not clear to Nigel. Either was undesirable. Two puffs of smoke, two shots rang out, two of the Bohemians fell from their saddles. Six or seven of their comrades fired wildly in the direction of the smoke. But Nigel's outposts had scuttled and taken up other positions. Again two shots rang out, this time more in the rear of the Count's party. One hit a horse, the other a rider. There was prancing and rearing, and three riderless horses tore back breakneck in the direction they had come. The Count shouted hoarsely, bidding his men

dismount and search. Nigel ran swiftly back and called to Blick and his comrade to follow the gorge to its hinder issue and await him. It may be imagined how Blick splashed through the water and reached the trembling Elspeth, who, standing as high as she could out of reach of the blood-stained water, was trembling all over at the unseen danger she ran.

Blick was for killing the Count, but this Nigel forbade, though there was justification enough. As far as his own deserters that was another matter. He wished to scatter them, disable them in detail, to avoid a hand-to-hand combat where numbers must tell against his little band, and gain time. The two outposts had fallen back upon the hinder mouth of the gorge. One was stationed behind Elspeth to keep the pass. The other three with Blick again spread out and lay *perdu* until the searchers came near, so near that the muskets of Nigel's men could scarcely fail to hit. Then one by one their voices spoke, reverberating through the forest, given back by the rocks, repeated by other rocks, and again howls and curses rent the air. The Bohemian deserters ran crouching here and there firing at trees they deemed men. And twice again the hidden marksmen hit the mark, and the Count, watched carefully by Nigel, was at his wits' end. With this kind of warfare he was plainly unfamiliar. He alone remained by his horse in company with a knot of five or six besides his body-servant. His guards were on the alert with their muskets ready to fire at the least sign, and every now and again a shot from one of Nigel's holster pistols came whistling about their ears, sufficiently near to increase the strain of their attention and make them feel, despite their knowledge of Nigel's strength, that the forest was full of enemies.

Once, twice, shots came perilously near hitting Nigel, but his advantage of the thicker cover saved him. Mean-

while Sergeant Blick managed his force of sharpshooters with amazing dexterity, advancing, retiring, picking off a man here or there. And the twilight came, less a state of light than of gloom. And the smoke of the powder hung just below the foliage, making everything uncertain. Nigel began to smell victory instead of merely a skilful retreat. The orders were, at the end of every three fusilades to reassemble at the gorge. Nigel led his men almost crawling through the bushes till they had the Count and his body-guard within easy musket-shot. The rest were scattered, as Blick had well contrived.

Then at a word four shots rang out together. Four men of the guard fell wounded or dead, and with a rush at the Count, sword in hand, Nigel put the finishing touch, for the Count in consternation threw down his own. The rest of his immediate followers grovelled on the ground and were quickly disarmed and bound. As for the others, who had grown dispirited by the slaughter and their wild-goose chase among the trees, as one by one they became acquainted with the culminating disaster, they slunk back to the rearguard, seized a horse apiece, and rode back on a harrying expedition of their own, which boded ill for Pastor Rad and his flock. Some, that is to say, for others were of that spirit which must follow a master, as a dog prefers the company of man. These threw down their muskets at the brusque command of Blick, and a few minutes afterwards Blick had them on horseback without weapons, his own men in front and rear and the riderless horses beside them, awaiting the command to march. Elspeth, all cheerfulness again, stood waiting. Nigel and the Count were a little way off.

"There is no quarrel between us, Count!" said Nigel. "We have broken bread together in the house of our friend the Abbot of Fulda!"

"A jolly host!" said the Count in a tone of ingratiation, a little forced.

"But," Nigel continued, "it seems to me that your errand has an object which is not conducive to the Emperor's service, which is mine."

"In what, colonel?"

"To find you at Fulda bearing presents and messages from Wallenstein was nothing that could offend the Emperor. But to find you in the company of the Landgrave of Hesse?"

"Wherein was the offence?" the Count inquired courteously. "I admit I had messages to the Landgrave from the Duke of Friedland, from one Count of the Empire to another. What then?"

"The Landgrave had gathered an armed force. He is about to march to join Gustavus. What else? To deliver messages from a subject of the Emperor to an open foe is surely a grave matter of offence!"

"I am sorry you should think so!" said the Count. "It is not for me to weigh wars and parties. The Duke of Friedland bids me carry certain messages to certain of the great ones of the earth. I do it to the best of my poor ability. To Bohemia the Emperor is a name, a usurper of the kingship."

"Does that excuse the seduction of my men, who are the Emperor's, paid, clothed, and fed by the Emperor?"

"As to that," the Count smiled, "they chose to desert you to follow a countryman of their own! No great crime, surely? I could not compel them. They chose."

"And chose badly, it seems," Nigel responded grimly. "Now before we proceed I must search you for any letters you may carry."

"I carry none!" said the Count, flushing, as Nigel rapidly passed his hands into his pockets, over his hose, and other vestments.

"As for your valise and holsters I can examine them later. Meantime you are my prisoner, and will be shot down if you attempt to escape!"

"But!" protested the Count.

"There is no 'but'!" said Nigel. "Be good enough to mount!"

The Count bit his moustache and mounted. Nigel, having first perched Elspeth on a horse, which he led, strode immediately in front, his left hand on the rein, his right hand holding his drawn sword in case of accidents.

The road was a mere bridle-track where single file was a necessity. On the right for a mile or so it lay along the steep slope of the rising ground, not so much precipitous as steep. For horses and men alike it was necessary for progress to follow the pathway. Every now and again cross paths came into view, but Elspeth knew the forest as if it had been the highroad and kept steadily on. Above them the high tree-tops towered, tall pines and straight slender beeches, whose foliage had learned to grow only upon the topmost boughs. Now and again they came to a broad clearing where clear sky was. Then the line of the ridge swept over to the east and the steepest declivities were to the left. The riders and Nigel looked down into the great hollows in the woodland, flanked by great naked boulders that stood up out of the sea of leaves, the countless heaping of unnumbered years. And now the moon was up and patches of white light streaked the boles of trees, and the leaves, and ceased to be, for the further darkness of the shadows.

Now the pathway leads up by zigzags. Elspeth whispers that they are now upon the Wartburg itself, and bids Nigel look down and out, and surely there in the moonlight he can see, a mile or two away, the outliers of the

town of Eisenach, else hidden by another hill which juts between.

Nigel calls a halt, and, to the Count's chagrin, just concealed and no more, orders Blick to descend with the Count and the others to the camping-place without the town where the regiment should be.

He himself with one soldier for his guard mounts the zigzags with Elspeth, passes beneath the bridge wherefrom he is challenged by the sentry, and stands at the outer gate of Luther's famous asylum.

There is the clank of men-at-arms, the murky flicker of the lanthorns, rattling of bolts, and Nigel is admitted. The guard fears no surprise from a single officer, a single trooper, and a maiden half dead with fatigue, whose stockings are soaked with water, and that the reddened water of the Dragon's Gorge.

Over the stones of the causeway of the outer court, through the arch below the guard-room, they reach the inner courtyard, bathed in the moonlight, serene, still, but for the splashing of the fountain. Beyond, where the white walls of the castle are not, is the limitless night and the limitless sea of tree-tops just flecked by the moonlight.

The doors are opened hospitably and the red glare of fires made visible.

Then the Landgrave himself, the Landgravine, with their gentlemen and ladies, troop into the hall. And almost before Nigel can explain his errand, a lady steps out, tall beyond her fellows, and cries aloud—

“Elspeth! Little Elspeth Reinheit! In what a plight!”

It was Otilie von Thüringen.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A CLASH OF HEARTS.

BUT for the dark eyes of Otilie von Thüringen Nigel Charteris would have led his reluctant horse down to the camp. He had leisure to make this reflection as he sat at meat some degrees below the Landgrave, who, though supper was over, still sat at the high table with a flask of Rhenish wine before him. The Landgravine had gone to her retiring room again. The Lady Otilie had borne off Elspeth, who, Nigel reflected, must be very hungry. He did not know that this reflection he shared with the sage and high-born lady, who was at this time encouraging Elspeth to make a hearty supper, not omitting a goblet of mead, which aided Elspeth's tongue to recover its native fluency.

It was true that the dark eyes of Otilie von Thüringen had sparkled with delight and surprise at the sight of Nigel. Nigel was a Scot, and therefore set the sparkle down to the credit of his account. But Nigel was a Scot, and therefore also asked himself why the lady's spirit, as reflected in her eyes, should be so elate. And Otilie herself could not have told why, would not have admitted that she was elated. And half an hour after she had carried off Elspeth she had become so deeply interested in the account of the fight in the Dragon's Gorge that she

had forgotten the Scots colonel altogether, in her interest in the movements of Count von Teschen.

Who was he? Elspeth Reinheit did not know. The men with him were deserters from the Emperor's troops. Where was he? Doubtless a prisoner with the regiment lying on the outskirts of Eisenach. The Scots colonel had brought the Count's holsters and valise with him. She did not know why. Elspeth, oblivious of the Lady Ottilie's anxieties, munched and drank. She had undoubtedly a healthy appetite, and was besides waxing sleepy.

The Landgrave said little. He yawned a good deal, and Nigel had supped. He too felt drowsy. It was not wonderful after his long day. The serving-man who had attended to his needs took a silver candlestick and led him up the stair towards his chamber. But at the top, where two passages met on a broad landing, the Lady Ottilie swept out of the darkness and took the candlestick from the man's hand, and motioning to Nigel to follow, herself ushered him into his bedroom.

There was something womanly and homely about the action, that accorded well with Nigel's notion of hospitality, yet she carried herself with the air of the chatelaine, as if she, and not the Landgravine, who doubtless had deputed the courtesies to her, had been the mistress of Wartburg.

As he threw an involuntary glance about the chamber, noting the great four-posted and canopied bed, the ambry for linen, the Venetian mirror, and other furnishings, she said—

"In Magdeburg 'twas Elspeth who gave up her bed to you. Here do I the same. It is a small courtesy for your many."

"Did I not say to you at Erfurt that a woman owes a man nothing that she does not pay a thousand-fold?"

But now you do me untold honour!" was Nigel's word of thanks.

"Sweet thanks and compliments! And doubtless you gave as much and more to little Elspeth at Magdeburg. She has poured such a tale of Colonel Nigel Charteris into my ears to-night I am wellnigh tired of him. Who is your prisoner at the camp?"

"A Bohemian, a Count von Teschen!"

"And his crime?"

"He caused some of my troopers to desert, and then pursued me hotly on my road to the Wartburg."

"It was a scurvy trick!" There was genuine indignation in her tone. "You must beware! Promise me, you will beware!" she pleaded; and Nigel, looking at the dimming of her eyes and her lips on the brink of quivering, felt a wave of tenderness flow over him. He leaned towards her and took her hands.

"You care for me, Ottilie?" There was a world of eagerness in his tones, such eagerness as made his voice sound hoarsely in his own ears.

She smiled a pitiful smile as she drew her hands from his as not trusting her silly tell-tales. Then she said—

"Do you so soon forget my words at Erfurt, my tall captain?"

"You said I should be a fool to dream of it!"

She nodded, but this time sadly.

"I shall play the fool, Star Ottilie! So help me, Holy Mother of Heaven!"

"Not here then! I have stayed too long. What of your valise? Give me an order. They shall bring your baggage."

There was an inkhorn and paper at a little table and he wrote a line and signed it.

"This is to my soldier servant!" He handed it to her in a dream of happiness.

She went swiftly, and before many minutes had passed the man brought his baggage and holsters and laid them on the floor. The trooper was half asleep and bemused with the beer or the mead he had drunk.

"And the Count von Teschen's?" Nigel asked.

The man waved an arm vaguely and explained something in an inarticulate way, and then stared and blinked at his colonel in a manner that made it clear at least that there would be no sense in his head till the morrow, and Nigel sympathised with the man, for he was scarcely rested enough himself to take off his own boots. So he dismissed the man, and a few more minutes saw his devotions, addressed mainly to a mythical Saint Ottilie, and his ablutions, alike concluded, and the Landgrave's four-poster shut him into dreamless oblivion.

At five the sun streaming in, even finding its way between the curtains of the four-poster, awoke him. A moment to regain the sense of his position in the universe, during which the geometrical figure of the great Pietro Bramante sprang to his mind again, and made him wonder where he was on the line of his own orbit, and he leaped from the bed and gazed out and down upon that wonderful rolling sea of tree-tops and hills behind hills, all clad in pines, and little villages in green spaces here and there.

He did not dawdle over his dressing, yet before it was half accomplished the Landgrave's barber was at his door craving admittance with the implements of his art, and his expert fingers made the colonel's face as fresh and dapper as razor and soap could do.

"The Lady Ottilie von Thüringen bade me tell your lordship that your other baggage has been brought up by your trooper and placed in the little room which is beside this one."

One may be sure that the colonel was not long in enter-

ing the room, which a look at the tambour frame, the spinning-wheel, and some other objects, told him was a small boudoir used by the ladies of the castle.

Upon a stout oaken table lay the valises and holsters of the mysterious emissary.

Nigel's hands were upon the straps when the Lady Otilie came in, partly with the assured air of the woman in her own domain, partly showing the modest shyness of a woman who, liking a man beyond the common measure, seems to crave pardon for intrusion into his company.

"You have slept well? I see you have, tall captain!"

"Thanks to you, Otilie!" he said, taking her hands and gazing into her proud beautiful face with something of mastery in his grip and in his eyes.

Her own countenance grew cold as she looked far beyond him out upon the pine-clad hills.

"How well you begin the day, sir!" Her glance fell scornfully upon the baggage. "The sack of cities! The plunder of travellers! A strange life!"

There was no need to point the irony, a woman's irony, full of half truth and false inference.

The blood flushed into his face. Then he assumed command over his fiery temper.

"The fortunes of war merely! This von Teschen is I know not what. He comes from Wallenstein."

"From Wallenstein!" She repeated it with eyes again seeking the pine-clothed hill-tops.

"Yes! From that cold seeker after power who would use the Habsburgs for a stepping-stone and play the Cæsar, as you said at Erfurt. I have not forgotten your saying, Otilie!"

"You are strangely familiar, sir, to a . . ." she faltered.

"To a cousin of the Habsburgs," he put in.

"Who told you I was cousin to the Habsburgs?" she asked promptly.

"The Archduchess Stephanie! And in truth did I not know you to be the Lady Ottilie von Thüringen, I could believe Her Highness was here."

"Her Highness is very gracious to acknowledge me of kin. My interests and the Habsburgs lie far apart."

"And I," said Nigel, "eat the bread of the Habsburgs, and what I do must and shall be right in your eyes, if it be right in mine!"

The Lady Ottilie's eyes blazed with scorn and resentment.

"Go on with your task of rifling the traveller's saddle-bags," she said, but made no movement to go. Nigel smiled to himself as he bent again over the straps.

First the holsters were rummaged. Pistoles and a few travellers' necessities. Nothing! Then the first saddle-bag revealed two rich suits, linen, the impedimenta of a man of rank on a long journey. Nigel examined the sewing, the lining of the bag. Again nothing. Next came the turn of the other saddle-bag. In it were many rouleaux of gold, enclosed in many wrappings. Again she taunted him.

"Said I not plunder?" she said. "Surely a fair ransom for the Count von Teschen! Pay for the troopers and their brave colonel!"

Again Nigel heeded not a jot. If it bit into his pride, at least he smiled as he went on. Packages of costly trinkets, jewels, articles of great price and workmanship.

"It is no wonder the Count helped himself to an escort!" she said. "And all for nought! To fall in with a robber lord from Scotland! 'Twas ill luck!"

"And this is Wallenstein!" said Nigel. "These are his bribes, his compliments, his wheedlers to set honest Landgraves and bishops and princes against his master, the Emperor! I cannot understand it."

"It is beyond the robber lord's understanding!" Again the scorn whipped him.

Again he flushed, and for a moment Ottilie von Thüringen trembled for the outburst. It did not come. She marvelled at the strength of his will. And then she caught her breath, for her eyes saw something. Her impulse was to snatch at it, beyond all the pride of race that was hers. But she also quelled herself. He saw it too and drew it forth. He knew the hand. It was Wallenstein's. A sealed letter, and the superscription was to the high-born Baroness Ottilie von Thüringen.

With perfect coolness and grace he handed it to her.

"Our Cæsar has strange postmen of his own!" he said.

This time it was the Lady Ottilie who flushed, but whether it was with anger, or with joy, or confusion as with a woman who, while entertaining one suitor hears another announced, there was no guessing. She hid the letter in her bosom.

"Then the Count was on his way to the Wartburg!" Nigel said aloud for her to hear.

"He will be here in a short while!" she said serenely.

"What do you mean, lady?"

"Just that! Have you done with the Count's saddlebags?"

There was nothing else in writing. Nigel replaced everything.

"And you take nothing, tall captain? Neither gold, nor raiment, nor trinkets? What ails you?"

"Not a jot! He can come for his own if he can travel so far," said Nigel. "And for your sweet aid, your comfortable words, your hospitality, I pray you, sweet Ottilie, Star of the Night, and Serpent of the Morning, take this and this." And without more preamble he took her in his arms and kissed her willy-nilly passionately upon the brow, the eyes, the lips. And then in the same whirlwind he rushed down the stair and called for his horse, his man,

his baggage, and in a few minutes rode down the hill at a breakneck speed.

Looking up at the great tower before he passed out of sight he saw a white arm extended and a scarf waved in the morning breeze.

"God's truth! Where am I?" he exclaimed, and waved his sword in the sunlight.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MISTRESS AND ENEMY.

THERE had been two human obstacles to the advance of Gustavus Adolphus. One was George William, Elector of Brandenburg, whose fortresses of Custrin and Spandau, held by any one but Gustavus, were awkward things in the way of a retreat, if the Swede had to make one. George William was very averse to the Edict. Magdeburg was one of the pearls of his principality. But not being sure that Gustavus was strong enough to beat the Emperor, he shilly-shallied. Gustavus in his impetuous way had appeared at the gates of Berlin with a bodyguard of Swedes armed and trained to a fine point. George William saw them and hesitated no longer. Custrin and Spandau were lent to his friend Gustavus.

The advance of Gustavus southward was thus secured till he should come to the Elbe, and across fine flat country suitable for such a march. Once across the Elbe, he would be between Tilly and the Emperor. He would also be in Saxony.

But the obvious crossings of the Elbe were at the bridge of Dessau and the bridge of Wittenburg, both in the hands of the Elector of Saxony, John George.

John George had not made up his mind. He was an Elector of the Empire. He was also prince of a large territory. And the southern march of his lands was also

the march of Bohemia, and the south-west was the upper Palatinate in the hands of Maximilian since the days of the Winter King. He was also averse to Edicts and in favour of the pure Gospel as represented by Lutheranism. But like the young man in the days of the founder of the original Gospel, he had great possessions.

Unlike his brother Elector of Brandenburg, he was not liable to a sudden nocturnal visit from the impetuous Gustavus, since a very large and populous country lay between, but, apart from such forcible persuasion, the policy of Saxony was not as yet to break from the Emperor. In the days of the Winter King he had refrained from joining in the mad escapades of the Protestants. He had no desire to do so now. Neither was he inclined to bow to the Edict. And to meet the urgent demands of the Emperor on that head, he had bethought himself of the strong man armed. He had armed accordingly. Through the kindly offices of Wallenstein, who was not unwilling to see the Saxons arming, he had been able to secure a good Lutheran general — one Arnim, who, like his old captain, Wallenstein, was without a command. The Elector of Saxony had forty thousand soldiers in spick and span new uniforms getting drilled by Arnim. But whether they would ultimately fight Gustavus, or merely grow fat and well-liking under the pay and treatment of Arnim, and never fight at all, John George was not at present sure.

There was the situation. Gustavus was entrenched in a fortified camp at Werben, where the Havel joins the Elbe, sixty miles north of Magdeburg, with smaller forces holding Spandau on the Havel and Custrin on the Oder, a line of a hundred and fifty miles from west to east. Tilly and Pappenheim (Maximilian's Pappenheim) were near Magdeburg. And sixty miles south of Magdeburg were the brand-new forty thousand of John George.

Colonel Nigel Charteris had seen enough in his journey to hasten his march northward to Tilly. From all directions he heard that the Landgrave of Hesse was marching to join Gustavus. And the news of the preparations of John George had reached Eisenach. The whole of Thuringia was in ferment.

But the reason of Nigel's uncommon haste down the hill to his camp outside Eisenach was on account of that curious ambassador, Count von Teschen. Nigel feared some mischance. Otilie! Star Otilie had said . . . what matter? Nigel galloped into camp. Hildebrand handed him his own order brought earlier that morning by his own trooper, attended by one of the Landgrave's huntsmen—

"Send the Count to the Wartburg under escort.

"NIGEL CHARTERIS."

The colonel made a gesture of annoyance.

"A good imitation, Hildebrand! Confound him! The best thing we can do is to get on to Erfurt."

And on the road to Erfurt he had leisure to blame himself for listening to her whom he omitted to "confound."

One does not commit to the nether gods the woman one has kissed, and kissed in a very paroxysm of passion, whether she would be kissed or not—the woman who has let her scarf flutter an adieu to one, the affront notwithstanding, as one rode away. Not even when she has tricked the affronter of a prisoner, an emissary of a traitor, who has sent the woman a letter full of . . . the nether gods know what, treason or love.

What part was she playing in the political intrigue? It was clear that she had recognised the Count von Teschen as the hand of Wallenstein, that she knew him to be essential, so far as his possibilities went, to the further—

ance of Wallenstein's designs. There might easily be a dozen Count von Teschens, foxes with firebrands at their tails, rushing hither and thither, but foxes that knew their business and the right cornfields, and how themselves to escape the flames that they spread.

Nigel's own sense of duty permitted him no sympathy with Wallenstein. Yet he could understand how Wallenstein, bereft of his command, hoping nothing more from the Catholics, impatient of inaction, unable to bear the loss of prestige, more akin in spirit to the great captains of *condottieri* that had ravaged Italy, indifferent which prince they fought for, how such a Wallenstein might endeavour to curry favour with the Protestant princes rather than rust like an old ploughshare. It was intelligible, but only as the work of a man without gratitude, without loyalty, without any conviction of his religion.

And what part was Otilie playing? She was a Catholic. So was Wallenstein. She had friends among the Protestant princes. So had many members of Catholic families. She had gone so far as almost to jeopardise her life, and, what was more, her honour, in the siege of Magdeburg. To what had she trusted then to deliver her? She must indeed have been full of the ecstasy of religion if she supposed that God, who must have approved of the Catholic cause, would shield her in the midst of carnage and the glutting of lust which had strewn the ruins of Magdeburg with the bodies of the violated. Nigel had surprised her in the cathedral at Erfurt at her devotions. But even then, and especially in that walk afterwards together, he had not read her as devout; rather as a woman intensely capable, self-sufficing, made for love but not awakened to it, with the respect and instinct for religion that every woman should possess as part of her endowment.

Then she had spoken of Wallenstein, and he could recall her tones, proud, indignant: "What think you that Ottilie von Thüringen can have in common with that cold seeker after power?"

Yet she had stood by him, Nigel, full of taunts as he ransacked von Teschen's saddle-bags, knowing that, or at least expecting, that he would find a letter for her under Wallenstein's own hand and seal.

Was the Erfurt episode a piece of acting, and was she then Wallenstein's mistress, or bound to him by some tie of chivalry, some mimicry of the romances of Torquato Tasso?

Mistress? At the very thought Nigel dug his spurs so savagely into his horse that the animal, disgusted and outraged, performed such a curvet as nearly threw him. No! Such supreme and noble loveliness had never soiled its freshness by any breath of desire! This Nigel would have sworn, and made good his oath, as any paladin of old time, with sword against sword. More, he would have sworn that his own lips in that frenzy, and gentle even in that frenzy, had been the first to ruffle the sweet fragrance and surprise the dewiness of hers, unconscious as she was that she had not merely suffered what she could not help. By that kiss he had sealed her his. And insensibly he began to regard her as in some measure two women,—one the star of his desire and worship, the other the mysterious ally of the Emperor's enemies, against whom he must plot to unravel her designs and those of the arch-plotter Wallenstein.

From this point his thought jumped at a bound to that other mistress, the Archduchess Stephanie, whose loveliness, no less than Ottilie's, impressed itself upon him, mingled with something of awe of the great Habsburgs. She too was interested in the destiny of Wallenstein. But of Wallenstein himself or his plans she had told him

nothing. The mystic circles and ovals interested or amused her perhaps, but of any intimate understanding between her and the Duke of Friedland Nigel could not remember a trace. Doubtless at the Court of Vienna there was a Wallenstein party as well as a Maximilian party. It was almost certain; and the Archduchess Stephanie might, as princesses have done, have flattered herself that she was leading a party, while in reality her name for a few aspiring nobles was merely a lure used by wire-pullers, who let her know nothing of their real machinations.

Still at the one end stood the lofty Archduchess, at the other her lovely and almost twin cousin, Ottilie von Thüringen, and between Wallenstein, the cold seeker after power, swaying, utilising both to further his schemes and ambition.

Nigel groaning in spirit, continued to ride on, and presently reached Erfurt.

At Erfurt he found the small garrison full of rumours of an impending attack from the Landgrave of Hesse Cassel, and although he had reason to believe that that prince was not yet in a posture to march, Nigel thought it wise to leave his regiment there with Hildebrand, partly to get further drilling and some rest for their horses, partly to overawe the townspeople and put the place in some condition to resist the Landgrave should he venture to attack it. In the meantime, with a small escort, he rode as fast as his horses could go to Wolmerstadt, where he found General Tilly.

The little great man received him with his customary grimness of demeanour. The thin hollow cheeks looked hollower than before, and the red feather in the small high peaked hat danced with a more sinister gaiety than ever.

"Well, Colonel Charteris?" Tilly never forgot his officers nor their names. "Where is your regiment?"

“At Erfurt, General!”

“Why?”

“The Landgrave of Hesse was mustering his troops when I spoke to him seven days ago. They say he is marching now to join Gustavus.”

“I’ll give him something to march for! And he shall find little to eat on his march,” barked Tilly. “What artillery at Erfurt?”

Nigel answered that they had twelve pieces of ordnance and sufficient ammunition.

General Tilly gave immediate order for two thousand foot and two thousand horse to be made ready to start.

And the next day, trusting the command of the remainder of the army to Pappenheim, the grim old general set out through the territories of Saxe Ernest and Schwarzburg, laying waste the countryside, and allowing his troops to plunder and then burn the little town of Frankenhausen by way of teaching the inhabitants not to have leanings towards Sweden.

In this way Tilly reached Erfurt, where he quartered his troops and levied a substantial voluntary contribution of money and provisions. Thence he sent messengers to the Landgrave, who had in fact not yet begun his march, with instructions couched in haughty language that he should disband his army and receive imperial garrisons into his fortresses.

Hildebrand and his regiment were sent on to the camp at Wolmerstadt to await Nigel, who, at the same time as Tilly set out, had been ordered to carry out reconnaissances in the direction of Werben and watch the movements of Gustavus on that bank of the Elbe.

It was not so much that Tilly feared the Landgrave of Hesse, as that he was fretting at the inactivity imposed upon him by the state of affairs. At Wolmerstadt he and Pappenheim were strong enough to attack Gustavus, had

it not been for the troops which the Elector of Saxony had mustered in his rear. Gladly would he have attacked the Elector if the Emperor had given him permission. But as yet John George had not declared himself. So Tilly contented himself by threatening the smaller prince of Hesse Cassel and wasting the borders of Saxony.

The Landgrave of Hesse was of a different mould from John George. This was his reply to Tilly—

“As for admitting foreign troops into my fortresses, I will not. As for my troops, they are mine to do my will. As for your threatening, I can defend myself when you attack me.”

CHAPTER XXV.

BREITENFELD.

THERE is always a moment in every war when wary inaction gives way to movement, bred of an access of boldness to one side or the other.

Gustavus had received an addition of eight thousand Swedes and six thousand English. He had persuaded George William, the Brandenburger, to throw in his lot with him. Pappenheim and Tilly had made, but not followed up, an abortive attack on his fortified camp at Werben. He decided to cross the Elbe and advance to the southern limits of Mark Brandenburg, whether the Emperor's generals resisted him or not. It is possible that he thought such an advance would assist John George of Saxony, whose territory lay next in his path, to make up his mind.

And at this time the Emperor Ferdinand was aware that Count Furstenburg, his chief commander in Austrian Italy, had arrived by leisurely marches with twenty thousand veteran troops by way of Franconia and the upper Palatinate, to join Tilly's army, so that, like Gustavus, he also intended to assist John George of Saxony to make up his mind.

To Pappenheim, Tilly being still at Erfurt, or in the confines of Thuringia, Nigel brought word of the advance

of Gustavus. Pappenheim sent word to Tilly, and Tilly returned to concert operations.

They had scarcely joined hands again when the Emperor's messenger arrived bidding them forthwith march into Saxony.

Imperial courtesy demanded that the Emperor's general should give John George at least a single opportunity of submission. Two officers of high rank were sent to the Elector with an imperious demand. John George made a dignified reply as became a prince, entertained the officers with Saxon hospitality as a prince, and at the close of the banqueting uttered this dry and humorous warning:—

"Gentlemen, I perceive that the Saxon confectionery, which has been so long kept back, is at length to be set upon the table. But, as it is usual to mix it with nuts and other hard ingredients, I pray you to take care of your teeth."

In a short space Tilly was before Leipzig, threatening it with fire and sword, and the fate of Magdeburg; and Pappenheim was thirty miles to the west taking possession of Merseburg.

Then John George made up his mind.

Then rode messengers offering alliance to Gustavus, who, ever mindful of a possible evil day and a clear line of retreat, demanded the fortresses he had asked for before.

John George offered these, offered his family as hostages—whatsoever Gustavus would. Magdeburg, which was another's, had failed to move him. But Leipzig (the prudent city had surrendered on conditions to Tilly) did move him. It might be Dresden next. Besides, he had forty thousand men in brand-new uniforms, bright and hard Saxon confectionery, and Arnim the Lutheran, who had once commanded under Wallenstein, to lead them. Surely between his forces and Gustavus they might trip

up Tilly and Pappenheim, and knock the two elderly generals' heads together till they cracked.

So it happened that before John George quite realised that war was upon him, that he had at last committed himself to a side, his beloved country was overrun with armies, and there dawned the day of Breitenfeld, or as some prefer to call it, of Leipzig.

Nigel and Hildebrand were exchanging a few words over a hasty breakfast, while Sergeant Blick was, with the aid of the other officers, overlooking the arms and saddles of the troopers.

"Thank Heaven!" said Hildebrand, "we are meeting the Swede at last! Yet the old man looks grey this morning!"

"Aye!" said Nigel. "Tilly has not been himself since he made his headquarters in the gravedigger's house outside Leipzig."

"It was an ill omen that the only house that was left after our cannonade should be a gravedigger's, with skulls and cross-bones all over it," said the other lugubriously.

"Tut, man! So long as it kept out the weather! Though why Tilly let the Swede and John George join forces without a shot puzzles me. He seems, though he says nothing, to hold the Swede in too much respect."

"Well, the Swede has all his work to do. Tilly has made his dispositions well."

They pushed back their seats and went out.

Behind them was a long range of hills, along which three hundred feet above where they stood were posted battery after battery of Tilly's guns. The two officers looked out over a gently sloping plain to the eastward and descried the long line of a little river, marked here and there by clumps of willows, and the occasional gleam of the morning sun on its surface. Beyond the rivulet at some miles' distance they could make out men and

horses in movement, banners, and the play of light upon a rippling sea of weapons: but all was as yet indistinct, save that there seemed to be two separate armies with a considerable space of country between.

"Gustavus does not wish us to confound his well-trained veterans with the Saxon gingerbread!" said Hildebrand.

"But which is which?" asked Nigel. "For my part I ask nothing better than to let fly my rough-riders at the Swedes, and let any one else hew down the Saxons!"

"Hum!" said Hildebrand. "Heaven knows how our rascals will behave under fire!"

Nigel's eyes gleamed. "I'll cut down the first man that wavers!"

"Well," said Hildebrand. "Thank Heaven again we're attached to Tilly's division, for where that is will be the hottest of the fighting. He's a devil to fight is Tilly."

"It is the Empire or the Swede to-day. And Tilly knows it. No wonder he looks grey. There he is! Come along!"

They took their places in front of the regiment. They were on the right wing of the centre division. The infantry in closely massed battalions stretched for a long distance. Then came the cavalry of Tilly's left. Beyond them was a division of Pappenheim stretching away into the haze. To Nigel's right again was the division led by Count Furstenburg, a formidable host in itself.

"Your men look mettlesome, colonel," Tilly growled, as he rode along by Nigel's regiment, his well-known red feather standing out in the westerly breeze.

Nigel saluted again. "They will give a good account of themselves, general!" he said loud enough for the regiment to hear.

Presently it was clear to all those who had good eyes that the Swede was to oppose Pappenheim, and was

moving in a long line towards the rivulet, was, in fact, nearly at its bank. The guns of Tilly on the hills sounded a salute to the great day, the first balls falling, however, short of the rivulet. Tilly noted it and looked displeased enough. Pappenheim noticed, and led his cavalry to the water's edge to dispute the passage. The battle had begun. Even at the beginning the generalship of Gustavus made itself felt. His men were disposed in two long lines of no great depth. There were no massed battalions to offer easy marks for Tilly's cannon. His whole forces were distributed in small bodies, each able to move with celerity, and accustomed to draw to itself and oppose its own share of the attack, without, however, causing any break in the general plan. But his musketry made play upon the splendid cavalry that swept down in orderly fashion to meet them. And from the intervals of the regiments of musketeers came the steady cannon shots, well aimed and low, making little lanes of fallen horses and men in Pappenheim's cavalry. Pappenheim was obliged to withdraw his cavalry to re-form them, and the Swedes began to cross the rivulet. The rivulet must needs be wide and deep that will stop any army extended over a wide front.

Pappenheim fired the village of Podelwitz as he retreated, a village that lay between his first position and the rivulet. The west wind laden with smoke and dust blew strongly and into the faces of the Swedes. But still they pressed on and began to get some of their artillery over.

From his position on the lower slopes of the hill Nigel could see the Swedish lines gradually formed, and marked the new plan of setting out the battle. To his mind it seemed to be tempting fortune on the part of the Swede to oppose a swarm of separate companies, of groups of companies, to the heavy masses that sooner or later in

the day were to sweep steadily upon them. But he did not count upon the advantages the Swede possessed in a more extended firing line, and in offering less conspicuous, if more numerous, targets to the enemy.

Nigel chafed at the inevitable delay till they should be ordered into action. For at least two hours the cannon along the ridge thundered over their heads and seemed to make little impression upon either Swedes or Saxons.

Then Pappenheim with his two thousand cuirassiers launched forth again against Gustavus himself, who commanded the right wing of the Swedes. And Nigel marked that the Swedish right were wheeling towards the north, and that their fire was fierce and evenly sustained.

At last the little general with the red feather gave orders for the centre to attack, and Nigel gripped his saddle tighter with his knees, and led his regiment down on to the plain, keeping within the interval between two great double battalions of musketeers and pikemen. It was slow at first, till they drew near the enemy, and then came the turn of his troopers. The infantry having delivered their fire advanced slowly, while Nigel's regiment and the other cavalry rode to the front rapidly, halted, fired, and fell back. This they did many times, but still the Swedes did not give way. Tilly felt not only the fire of the Swedes in front but that of Gustavus' right wing on his flank, so to avoid this and partly perhaps because the thing looked tempting, he took ground to the right, and ordered a rapid attack upon the Saxons, who perhaps by accident had drawn rather towards Tilly than to Count Furstenberg.

Tilly was right in the one thing. He bore down upon the Saxons, and the Saxon army showed its rawness; for it gave way on all sides, and only a few regiments maintained their ground; the rest fled, and even John George himself.

Nigel's spirits rose with Tilly's. Tilly swept round again to fall upon the left wing of the Swedes. But only to find that Gustavus, apprised of the Saxon flight, had reinforced his left with three more regiments, and that Pappenheim on Tilly's left was battling for dear life against Gustavus himself, unable to maintain his ground.

Desperately did Tilly endeavour to overcome. Again and again and again he led his still unbroken masses against Horn, the Swedish general, and again and again the Swedes hurled them back.

Again and again Hildebrand and Nigel charged with their rough-riders, who were no cowards, meeting alike musketeers and pikemen and even Horn's cuirassiers. But it was of no avail.

Then came the news that Pappenheim's men had broken and fled. Then that the artillery on the hills were in the hands of Gustavus, a fact that they soon became aware of. In face of them was the Swedish left, behind them were their own guns, and on their left flank Gustavus, marching through the *débris* of Pappenheim's host, was sweeping down upon them. The day was over. Nigel and Hildebrand rallied their tattered remnant of fifty saddles and rode after Tilly to act as his bodyguard. Nigel scanned the field with a quick eye and caught sight of him. A Swedish captain of horse was on the point of taking the little general prisoner when Nigel, spurring his horse, rode the Swede down.

Nigel's sword went through him. The man rolled over with the onset, and then fell with his upturned face grinning at his slayer in the very spasm of death. There was one final flash of recognition between four eyes. It was enough. Nigel was out of his saddle in an instant, an instant of deadly peril, ransacked the man's doublet,

took out a bulky letter, and sprang to horse again. They had remounted Count Tilly, who was barely able to sit his horse by reason of his wounds. Nigel bade two sturdy troopers hold him on by any means; and taking the lead, rallying whatever troopers came his way, and sending word to the few remaining foot-regiments to follow, he pressed with all speed towards the open country to the northward. It was a miserable remnant of a mighty army which bivouacked at Halle.

The last glimpse of the field of battle that Nigel caught had shown him Pastor Rad, with a regiment of Swedes on their knees before him, offering up in stentorian tones a thanksgiving for the Swedish victory over his German and Catholic brethren.

CHAPTER XXVI.

AT HALBERSTADT.

IT was the evening of the third day after Breitenfeld. Vague rumours of disaster had travelled across the intervening country of Halberstadt, city, bishopric, and independent state in one, a stronghold for, rather than of, the Empire, the domain and seat of Leopold the Bishop, a Habsburger and cousin of Ferdinand. The city was not strong enough to resist for long an attack by Gustavus, should he choose to make one, but it was strong enough to serve for a short while as a rallying-place for Tilly's fugitives.

Leopold the Bishop and his spoiled favourite niece, as he chose to call her, the Archduchess Stephanie, stood on the flat roof of the tallest tower of the palace looking along the road to the southernward. On the face of Leopold, a proud ecclesiastical face, rather rotund than ascetic, sat an extreme anxiety, and his sharp eyes roved restlessly from the road to the city walls, where men were mustered and ordnance trained, and officers bustled to and fro with an air of urgency. For who knew what a few hours might reveal, whether the banners of Sweden, or of Saxony, of Brandenburg or Hesse Cassel, would come swaying and fluttering from the passes in the hills.

The Archduchess for the most part kept her gaze fixed

upon the road, though, woman-like, she lost little of what went on below. Her eyes glistened with eagerness, but her features betrayed little of the drawn look that the Bishop's wore. If the Bishop noticed it, he said nothing, putting her apparent lack of anxiety down to the score of youth. But absorbed as he was in the inward contemplation of the stakes at issue, he did not closely scrutinise the face of his niece. For him the turn of events meant a very possible siege, a defence of sorts, a storming and a sack, or a judicious submission, but in any case a great inroad into his treasure-chests. It promised indignities falling short of bodily suffering, but hard to bear, and an ultimate disposal of his lands and possessions in ways that would at once reduce his princely bishopric to the dimensions of a paltry benefice, until the Lutheran tide should recede and the Church take her own again.

For the niece it meant excitement, peril, but peril that would pass. Princesses might be held to ransom, but no more. She might be expected to sympathise with her father in the defeat of his armies, to feel aggrieved at Fortune, who had dealt so hard a blow at her house, but not to be prostrated by her grief. She would still be the beautiful Archduchess Stephanie, and in the clash of armies and in the affairs of a hazardous campaign there was like to be scant attention paid to the matrimonial projects of Maximilian. Was this all? A cry broke from her lips, and she pointed to the farthest bend of the road visible from the tower.

"Now we shall know!" said the Bishop, clenching his lips firmly as if to make sure they did not tremble.

Round the bend came thirty or forty troopers, and the first man carried a yellow pennon.

"Tilly's men!" the Bishop exclaimed fervently. "To Thee be thanks, O Lord!"

The Archduchess's eyes were riveted. Whether her

emotion had really been restrained hitherto by pride or not, her eyes filled with tears: tears that she hastily brushed away, leaving her eyes again free to discern what they might.

This time it was a group of officers, and in the middle could be distinguished the famous red feather, drooping, it is true, but there.

“Count Tilly himself, Uncle!”

Behind the little calvalcade came a regiment of foot, still preserving a martial appearance, with its pikemen and its musketeers, and after it another and yet another.

It was almost pitiful to hear the proud Bishop, secure except for the ears of his niece, ejaculating his thankfulness, as each addition to his possible defenders came in sight.

Then as the cavalcade of officers approached the town gates the lips of the Archduchess murmured, “Holy Mother, I thank thee!” and she put her slender fingers into her uncle’s as if to communicate to him something of what she felt.

It was true that she had recognised Colonel Nigel Charteris among the war-worn leaders as they rode through the gate of Halberstadt, but why should the saving of this man’s life more than those of a thousand others elicit her cry of devotion?

Within an hour Leopold in his episcopal robes received Tilly and his officers. Beside him, arrayed in all her richest attire, sat the Archduchess Stephanie. The little general, the stains of his forced march removed as far as possible, his left arm in a sling, his head disfigured by the uncouth bandages of his barber surgeon, strode forward with a gallant air, but with an unmistakable limp. He had been wounded at Breitenfeld full a half-dozen times, and only his dauntless spirit and his stalwart supporters had helped him to sustain the toils of the retreat.

The Bishop received him with great compassion and honour, giving him great praise for his courage and placing him beside him in a noble chair: not, however, before the general had bowed as low as his wounds permitted and kissed the hand of the Archduchess, whose eyes melted at the sight of her father's faithful soldier, to whom fortune had shown herself so froward.

"Battered, your Highness, beaten, but with God's grace I will face Gustavus again!" he said to her.

Came Nigel's turn. He presented himself, in default of a better, in the suit he had worn at Breitenfeld. He was thin and yellowish for a man of his natural colouring. A day of battle and three days' flight before the pursuers had drained his vitality over and above his actual wounds, which had happily left his face unmarred and his limbs uncrippled.

The Archduchess claimed him.

"Colonel Nigel Charteris, Uncle. He came to Vienna with despatches from Magdeburg. A Scottish gentleman who has doubtless done good service in the battle!" She turned her eyes inquiringly towards Count Tilly.

"But for him I might not have left the field!" said Tilly briefly. "I scarce know whether he did me service or disservice, your Highness," he added, with something between a grunt and a sigh. "He fights like a wild boar!"

"A pity we had not a legion of such angels!" said the Bishop as he laid his hand in fatherly fashion on his shoulder.

The Archduchess motioned Nigel to her side.

"Believe me, Colonel Charteris, I am mighty glad that you have come through the battle unscathed; though you make not the figure of bravery you did at Vienna!"

"I am ashamed, your Highness, to meet your eye in such mean clothing, but the Swede gave us no time to

pack our valises, and, after all, one's own skin with a live man within is better than a coat of many colours upon a corpse."

The sun broke out in the eyes of the Archduchess.

"How you do take me at my word! You say nothing of surprise at finding me at Halberstadt? Does nothing surprise you?"

"Your Highness spoke of nunneries at our last meeting, and I find you in a Bishop's palace. In a nunnery I could not picture your radiance. Here you are in your own place, and under the tutelage of the Church, no less."

"Still the courtier of our camps! And have you met again our cousin Ottilie?" She flung the question at him carelessly, or so it seemed, as if she were indifferent as to the answer.

"That have I, your Highness!" he answered, looking straightly into the eyes of the Archduchess. And whether it was that he was fardone with his toils, his sudden remembrance of the Wartburg brought the colour back into his pale cheeks.

"So!" said the Archduchess. "There have been passages of arms between you! Ottilie is fortunate that she is not an Archduchess." There was a shadowy pretence of petulance in the princess's tone. "Did we not stipulate that you were our own cavalier?"

"In all liege service, yes, your Highness! Even to the death! Have I not fought for you at Breitenfeld? Have I not felt the Lady Ottilie pour out hot scorn upon me almost to the limit of man's forbearance, because I served the Emperor, and in serving him, your Highness?"

"I should not have deemed you one to brook over much scorn," she said, veiling her eyes, then flooding his face with their searching gaze.

"Nor am I by nature very patient, your Highness!"

"Then it must be that you love Ottilie! That if I can

claim your service, even your life, she, this meddler with the Lutherans, can claim and hold your love?" The Archduchess spoke in low tones. Again Nigel could almost persuade himself that it was Ottilie who spoke, wishful to hear his avowal of passion. And yet it was not Ottilie.

"Why should you begrudge her so small a gift, or rather so poor an offering, for I know not if she has accepted it?" he urged.

"Because a princess can never be sure that she commands love. Service she knows she can command, even to the death. Men will spend themselves for any bubble they call honour or duty. I grudge Ottilie your love. I grudge any woman that is loved, her lover's love." The Archduchess spoke with heat.

Nigel rejoiced that the Archduchess made it clear to him that in seeking the heart of Ottilie he was not spurning hers; that she was only giving tongue to the loneliness of rank. For in truth in the immediate presence of the Archduchess, radiant, full of charm, he felt the memory of Ottilie pale; and, loyal as he tried to be to his colours, whether in love or war, he would have been more than man not to have felt an answering emotion had anything she said given shape to the idea that she too loved him.

So much they were able to say amid the ceremonious tumult of the arrivals.

Supper was set and the good things of Halberstadt were lavished upon the officers who had accompanied the retreat. It was not long before the Archduchess and her attendant ladies left the hall for their own chambers. And it was not till the morrow that Nigel again saw the Archduchess.

The circumstances of a common peril loosened the observances of ceremony and made it possible for them

to meet, after Nigel had set in motion the springs of military duty which were immediately necessary. As before at Vienna the Archduchess received him in the gardens of the palace, but this time in broad daylight.

"And Bramante's figure?" she asked suddenly.

"A vain imagining, your Highness! Though at the time I own I was amazed at his jugglery."

"So you deemed it mere fooling?"

"What could I else? 'Tis true the course of my life has brought me into your Highness's gracious presence. But what of Wallenstein? The Emperor will have none of him. Gustavus has passed him by. He is as an old sword thrown in a chimney corner to stir ashes with."

The Habsburg pride and haughtiness made itself heard in her voice and seen on her lineaments.

"You do not know Albrecht von Waldstein. He is too great to rust. Can you not see that now, even now, when your armies have crumbled before Gustavus, while Tilly, the pride of Ferdinand, and Pappenheim, the pillar of Maximilian, have been broken in two like straws, that the supreme moment has come, the moment when the Emperor must and shall recall him, beg him as a suppliant to raise the fallen standards and gather yet again one of his mysterious and invincible armies, which shall drive Saxon and Brandenburger whimpering to their kennels, and Gustavus and his pastors scattering to their ships!"

The tones that began in pride and scorn had changed into tones of prophetic exaltation. And for the first time Nigel comprehended that the fortunes of Wallenstein were dearer to her heart than a lover's passion. She was not merely what he had imagined the titular queen of Wallenstein's party in the court, but her mind and heart were engaged, enthralled by the idea of the future greatness of Wallenstein himself.

But Nigel's straightforwardness would not let him budge from his self-appointed path.

"Wallenstein is not loyal to the Emperor!"

"Loyalty!" she exclaimed in a fine note of scorn. "Loyalty in German lands! In Europe! To what? To one's faith? That does not hinder father slaying son or brother brother. To one's pacts? It is as it suits one's interests! Feudalism is dead. The Emperor's vassals rise against him. And Albrecht von Waldstein is no vassal of the Emperor. He is a Bohemian noble. True, our house of Habsburg conquered Bohemia, and our brother is in name their king. But Bohemia is as free as it chooses, when it chooses."

"But Wallenstein served the Emperor, amassed untold riches in his service. Does he owe no allegiance?"

"Not a jot! He is of the race of Achilles! He fights where his eagle mind dictates, not where some trembling Agamemnon bids. But why call him disloyal?"

"Your Highness! I yield to none in admiration of Wallenstein's genius, but at every turn of my road I have met evidences of his emissaries being in touch with your father's enemies. This could have been borne, if he had boldly gone into the quarrel on the side of Gustavus, but to stay skulking at Prague while he sent out his poisonous messages . . ."

"Sir! I like not your adjectives!" she said, quickening her pace in her anger.

"And then waiting the event," Nigel proceeded, "to send this to Gustavus, *if he should be victorious*."

Nigel thrust his hand into his tunic and brought out a packet.

"Read what is writ!" she said carelessly.

"These for Gustavus in the event of his gaining a complete victory over Count Tilly."

"In the event," Nigel commented.

“Spare the commentary, Colonel Charteris! What lies within?”

— “In substance it is an offer from Wallenstein, begging for a command from Gustavus of a pitiful twelve thousand men, and promising in return to drive the Emperor and every Habsburg out of Austria.”

The eyes of the Archduchess flashed. Her colour rose. Her bosom heaved and fell.

She stretched forth her hand for the letter.

Nigel did not hesitate. He gave it. Was it not his to give, his only spoil of the battlefield?

“You have made no copy? Told no one?”

“No, your Highness!”

She held out her hand again in token of dismissal. Nigel kissed it, gave one swift glance at her imperial face and went away to the ramparts.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE RESTLESSNESS OF STEPHANIE.

THE next few days passed at Halberstadt in transforming the mass of fugitives into the semblance of an army. Cavalry and infantry were re-mustered under their regimental standards, where a nucleus existed in the shape of an old regiment. Where there was none, a new one was formed. All found an entry on some roster. The defences of the city were improved in all possible ways and provisions were got in. The little general busied himself in sending messages to all the imperial garrisons within reach to concentrate at a spot named, by the river Weser, and it was from this source that he expected to collect another army rather than from any fresh enlistments. Tilly with a bite and a sup would gladly have passed on. He fretted under the inaction which his numerous wounds made absolutely necessary: the more so that as yet he had no certain knowledge of the trend of the plans of his great adversary. Sometimes he talked as though he had done with war. These were the days when his wounds did not look like healing. Nigel knew the old war-dog well enough to ask, "Who shall succeed?" That stiffened the Count von Tzerclaës quickly enough.

He was one of those men who do not breed successors.

But by the first days of October it was announced and confirmed that Gustavus had turned to march westward, and that the Elector of Saxony was to march upon Prague. Tilly's plans soon took a definite shape. He, too, would march westward, but along the plains of Lower Saxony into Brunswick, then towards the Rhine, gathering garrisons as he went, till he could turn and meet Gustavus with a force sufficient to annihilate him.

Nigel's rough-riders became the nucleus of a regiment, which was given to Hildebrand von Hohendorf, and he himself was again chosen by Tilly for a confidential journey to the Emperor. This time nothing was committed to writing save the commendations General Tilly thought fit to make of Nigel's conduct in the battle and during the retreat. Tilly's plans for the future conduct of the campaign, and such requests as he had to make, were carefully committed to Nigel's memory. A small escort was given him, for the task of getting from Halberstadt to Vienna without falling into the arms of Gustavus's rearguard, or some of the widely-spread Saxon contingents moving, as doubtless many of them would be doing, eastward, was one requiring great vigilance, skill, and, above all, speed, and numbers would have availed less than nothing. His plan was to make his way as straightly as possible to the nearest point of the Bavarian border, and once across that, the roads to Vienna were for the present likely to be free from Swede and Saxon alike.

The only document he carried, in addition to Count Tilly's letter to the Emperor, was the extraordinary letter from Wallenstein taken from the dead Count von Teschen. This the Archduchess Stephanie had returned to him privately, with these few words inscribed upon the inside of the paper that enveloped them—

"The ardour of a great loyalty createth a cloud of smoke, seen through which other men's actions may be distorted out of the natural semblance of beauty. So doth the ardour of a great love."

Pondering over this, Nigel set out.

As to the Archduchess Stephanie, no sooner was Nigel set out than she began to feel a great restlessness, which manifested itself in very desultory marches, to the wearying of her ladies, up and down in the palace, with occasional forays out into the city and along the ramparts, in the course of which she pursued the officers of high rank with puzzling questions as to the possible course of the war.

"But it is impossible, your Highness, to give a guess!" said a grave and stout general officer. "When we know what force we have to dispose of——"

"Yes! Yes!" said the impatient princess. "But still, what do you think?"

"No one can say, your Highness!"

Her Highness left him to growl at his fellow-officers at the extraordinary habit of woman, even lovely woman, even a Habsburger, to ask questions which did not admit of an answer, and in any case did not concern her. Then she attacked the next she met with similar results.

She even dared to beard the old general in his quarters, beginning with sympathetic inquiries after his wounds. The old general, taciturn and not over gracious by force of habit, unbent a little to the Emperor's daughter.

"Give me time, your Highness, and I shall beat the Swede."

"How?"

"Look you, your Highness! The farther the Swede marches from the Baltic the longer must be his chain of garrisons in his rear, for if he once sustain a great defeat

he must retreat. By the time he reaches the Rhine his army of Swedes must be greatly diminished, and his force consist largely of German Protestants, recruited as he goes."

"And do not Protestants fight as well as Catholics?"

"When they are trained and disciplined!"

"And where will *you* get trained soldiers?"

"From the Imperial garrisons! Then there are the Spaniards in the Rhenish Palatinate, the best infantry in the world."

"And if Richelieu launches the French soldiers at them?"

"It would be the devil!" Count Tilly became very thoughtful. "It is not to be expected that a Catholic power would give aid to the Swedes. Was it not Richelieu who turned the scales against Wallenstein at Ratisbon?"

"But," objected the princess, "what did that prove? Did it not result in the dispersal of Wallenstein's army, and the weakening of the Catholic power, of the Imperial power?"

"I am not politician, your Highness! I hate cardinals and politicians equally. I am a soldier. If I have a moderate measure of fortune, and Pappenheim does not make any more blunders, it is odds but we beat the Swede, Richelieu or no Richelieu."

The Archduchess showed by her manner that she thought otherwise.

"There is Saxony! There is Brandenburg! There is Weimar!"

"Confound them all!" growled Count Tilly, who had done nothing else but look at the astonishing problem he proposed to face, and he at present tied by the leg with a mere eight or ten battalions under his banner. "And," this was an after-thought born of sheer impatience,

"your Highness, there is a lady who calls herself Ottilie von Thüringen, who takes a great interest in the Lutheran cause."

"Indeed!" said the Archduchess.

"She was taken prisoner at Magdeburg and sent under escort of Colonel Charteris to Erfurt! I saw her and had some words with her."

"Yes?" said the Archduchess.

"She bore a singular likeness to your Highness! I was wondering if you had any relative of that name!"

"I have never heard of one!" said the Archduchess.

"A mere coincidence, doubtless!" said the general.

"By the way, Count, I am thinking of leaving Halberstadt."

"Leaving Halberstadt! Does your Highness propose to ride with me to raise an army?"

"I might be of less use elsewhere!" she said, smiling, to tease the old general, whose dislike of petticoats was well known.

"Where is elsewhere?"

"Vienna!"

"And how do you propose to get there?"

"You can lend me an escort?"

"Impossible! You would want six battalions to fight off the rearguard of Gustavus, or the left wing of the Saxons."

"But you have just let Colonel Charteris go with a mere handful!"

"He will ride the faster! Colonel Charteris is a soldier, and the very devil for getting into trouble and out of it."

"But the Emperor's daughter?"

"Your Highness, were you the daughter of twenty emperors it would still be impossible."

"You think that I should not arrive at Vienna in safety!"

"Except as a prisoner. But your Highness came hither of your own choice."

"Assuredly! I intend to leave it of my own choice too."

Count Tilly tugged at his long moustaches in despair. "Princess!" And in addition to all his other cares! There was really only one princess, but she appeared to him by reason of her self-will to be at least half a dozen. She still stood there gazing at him out of those wonderful dancing black eyes. ("Confound her eyes," Tilly said to himself.)

"Perhaps Gustavus or John George might give me a safe-conduct if I required it."

"There are more unlikely things, your Highness! Particularly if your Highness made your request in person!"

"They could not be more obdurate than Count Tilly!"

"At the present time, your Highness, they are in better posture to afford courtesies than I am to spare men."

Her Highness pouted and went in search of her uncle, the Bishop. She thought to win him over before Count Tilly had seen him.

But her uncle Leopold, now that it seemed as if the tide of war was to sweep away from Halberstadt, was not willing to part with his niece. Even a Bishop of the Holy Roman Church, vowed to celibacy as he was, was not indifferent to ties of familial affection, and Stephanie's beauty and youth and intelligence were all living and pleasant things, not to be lightly set aside.

"You are as safe here, Stephanie, as in Vienna!"

"But I am not afraid! I would rather be where my father is!"

"But you came here to avoid marrying Maximilian or going into a nunnery, which was it?"

"Both, uncle. But Maximilian will be too busy for marrying for a long time to come. He has to find an army and beat Gustavus."

"In the next place, you can't get to Vienna!"

"Hardly without an escort! But you could persuade Count Tilly to give me a hundred men and two officers."

"It seems to me that Count Tilly would as soon go himself as part with half a company."

"He does not seem very willing, but I am relying on your persuasion, uncle."

"It is evident, Stephanie, that you cannot go at once. In a week or two more men may have come in. In a week or two the roads may be clear of the enemy. Promise me, dear niece, that you will defer the matter for ten days. You cannot grudge your old uncle ten days of your pleasant company!" The Bishop looked affectionately at her.

"For ten days longer, then, my uncle! Then escort or no escort, I must go."

"I will see what can be done!" said the Bishop.

The restlessness of the Archduchess was by no means allayed. For in her mind events were singing "Wallenstein." Now or never, surely, did the portents point to Wallenstein. Where was the Emperor going to lay his hands on a weapon to defend himself even against Saxony? The Saxons were about to pour down into Bohemia. And after that Vienna lay defenceless.

As to Wallenstein's letter to Gustavus, so far from regarding it as evidence of treachery or of ingratitude, at the least she saw in it only design, design to lure Gustavus on to his own destruction by making him think that the greatest army-leader in all German lands was willing to serve him.

The Archduchess told herself that the desire to see Wallenstein, to know his plans, to further them, was

at the root of her eagerness to depart. At Vienna she felt sure that in this crisis she would be strong enough to fight Father Lamormain on his own territory, and bring about the recall of the hero of her political dreams.

The Archduchess repeated it to herself with an unnecessary insistence that bespoke questions arising within. When a woman acts from a single strong motive, the motive becomes less something perceived in the mind than felt in the heart, something that makes no room for gainsaying.

Whereas there was Nigel, this Scots colonel, this soldier without a fortune, who was so full of this thing, this vaporous thing, loyalty. Colonel Charteris had not been brought up at court, still less any court in Europe. He had not acquired the ethics of the petty warfare that went on within every court, nor the still more elastic code of right and wrong as applied to the rivalries between court and court, nor a sympathy for the uncloaked knavery that dictated the moves in the game of treaties and alliances and attacks, provoked or unprovoked, that went on between the powers of France, of the United Provinces, of Spain, of Italy. To her all these things had been familiar. This soldier from the north country had seemed astounded that Wallenstein could act as he to all appearances had done. He had shown indignation, which not even her own royal presence had quelled. What a fiery soul beneath how noble a surface of manhood! She pictured him again and again with something of admiration, and admiration led her on, Archduchess as she was, to ask which was the more commendable, the spirit of loyalty which was Nigel's, or the spirit of entirely personal ambition which she herself was fanning in Wallenstein. This question she answered by a subterfuge that loyalty was commendable in Nigel, the more so that nothing

engaged him to it but his precious pay, but that personal ambition was the crown and essence of Wallenstein, and in him entirely laudable.

As to her ability to reach Vienna, the Archduchess had no doubt. Whether she had an escort of six, or sixty, or six thousand, her daring and resolute mind would convey her body there in safety. Of that she was confident. A supremely beautiful woman, of high rank, possessed of money and of such resources of speech and intelligence as hers, would in the end defeat the Saxon, Swede, or Brandenburger who should endeavour to stay her path. The real danger of the journey lay more in ignorant soldiery or lawless freebooters than in generals or politicians. For this and this only she would continue to press for an escort.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FATHER LAMORMAIN PREPARES THE GROUND.

FATHER LAMORMAIN had sent for Nigel. This in itself was a relief from the daily dispiriting round. Nothing could have been duller than the court of Vienna six weeks or more after Breitenfeld. The news which, despite a disunited Germany in arms, came with frequency to Father Lamormain through his far-reaching Jesuit agencies as well as by the military messengers, was to the effect that Gustavus was besieging Wurzburg, and that the Elector of Saxony, John George, having recovered Leipzig, was now clearing his province of Lusatia of the Imperial troops, sent there under Rudolf von Tiefbach, before he set out to the conquest of Bohemia.

Nigel himself was fretting. For by this time Tilly had gathered an army and had reached the Rhine. Nigel would fain have been with him. He found employment in Vienna helping to enrol and drill the troops that were being enlisted with a view to resisting the threatened invasion of Bohemia by the Saxon Elector, but men came in slowly. And over every one and every action brooded a spirit of depression. The outlook since the crushing defeat of Breitenfeld was not a pleasant one. There was a vague belief that Tilly on the Rhine, Pappenheim, who had managed to reach Westphalia and raise men there, the Spaniards in Lorraine and the Rhen-

ish Palatinate, and Maximilian in Bavaria, would in some way or other be too much for Gustavus. But there was no good news.

"How goes the recruiting, colonel?"

"Slowly! There is no spring in it, Father!"

"Ah! How many men do you think we shall have to meet John George?"

"That depends on Bohemia!"

"And Bohemia means?"

"Wallenstein!"

"I notice," said Father Lamormain, "that you do not pronounce the name in the same tone of admiration you once used to?"

"It is, I suppose, Father, that my eyes have been opened since I first came to Vienna!"

"You have sent many faithful reports of his unfaith, of his encouragement of Protestant princes, even of his offers to serve Gustavus! And you think that if your belief is true, he is unworthy!"

"I should say vile!" Nigel broke in.

"Yet upon him rests the possibility of resistance in Bohemia?"

"He lives in state in Prague, so they say, with a court and a multitude of retainers. His name is still something to draw men!"

"And what do you say if I tell you that the Grand Turk meditates an invasion of Hungary?"

"You must make your peace with Saxony!"

"The Emperor has sent orders to Rudolf von Tiefbach to withdraw from Lusatia."

"Saxony will look upon that as a sign of weakness rather than amity, and will invade us the quicker."

"So I think!" said the Father with a sigh. "But the Emperor would have it so."

"When you spoke of Wallenstein as you did just now,"

he went on, "you showed that you did not understand Wallenstein's point of view." The Jesuit spoke in a contemplative, persuasive way.

"I cannot understand disloyalty!" Nigel interposed.

"But is it? This man was a Bohemian at a time when Bohemia was not even an appanage of the House of Austria. He offered to raise an army to assist the Catholic cause. He was successful. Wallenstein became great in name, in riches, with a great army marching to his orders, began to regard himself as one of the princes of Europe, one of the greatest. The Catholic League dismissed him. This was a great shock to his pride, but not to his riches or to his name. He still considered himself a prince, owning no hereditary allegiance to the Habsburgs, none, in fact, to any man, free to offer his services, his alliance, where he would. His plan has been to fan the wind of Protestantism, not because he loves it, but in order that he might raise the whirlwind of a gigantic war!"

"Yes?" Nigel was eagerly attentive.

"Then Gustavus came. Hesse, Saxony, all assisted in the incantation! Tilly failed, Pappenheim failed! It is incredible how they failed."

Nigel said merely—

"Tilly failed because he departed from his original plan, and Pappenheim was out-fought. One mistake in a big battle is too many!"

"There is yet much that may happen. But we have still Saxony to deal with, and now the Grand Turk."

"It is possible that the Emperor might need Wallenstein again."

The Jesuit paused here and looked in a quizzical way at Nigel.

Nigel flushed. He could not understand Father

Lamormain talking in this way, as if he was the defender of Wallenstein against obloquy, when a few months before the same Father Lamormain, in company with Maximilian, was resolutely opposed to Wallenstein, even against the Emperor's inclination.

"It is difficult to believe that the Emperor would not rather die on the battlefield at the head of a faithful few than submit to such a course!"

"I believe," said the Jesuit, "that you would ride in the last charge by his side, as the old paladins did at Roncesvaux." His eyes roved over Nigel approvingly. He recognised the goodness of the metal from which with his own hammer he was striking the sparks. He was older, and his enthusiasm and his resolution were deeper down, not less there than Nigel's.

"But the war is of more importance than the Emperor, or than Wallenstein!"

Nigel looked puzzled.

"I came into the world not to bring peace but a sword," said the Father, crossing himself.

"You mean?" asked Nigel.

"The war that the Church has waged through all ages and will always wage! It is not by heroic deaths of Emperors, but by the steady perennial application of means to ends that she wins her way. It is more to her ultimate purpose and advantage to maintain the Habsburgs on the throne, to preserve their pomp and power, than to let them court certain destruction in order to add one more glittering legend to the roll of military saints!"

"I begin to see something of your meaning!" said Nigel. "Then Wallenstein is only an instrument that Holy Church intends to use?"

"Precisely!" said Father Lamormain, bringing his lips

together firmly, as if he could have added something further and had swiftly decided against it.

"And with what lure will you attract him?" asked Nigel.

"That we have yet to discover! He may decline altogether."

"No, Father. The man that has once commanded armies, not being a king, can never willingly lay down his baton to become a grazier of oxen, unless he be too old to march even in a litter."

"I am a man of peace, you know!" said the Jesuit.

"But you will never lay down your baton till you die!" said Nigel with understanding. Beneath the suavity were *finesse* and a high intelligence, but below all was the measureless strength of purpose and zeal for the cause that was of the essence of his life. Nigel saw this as in a glass darkly. That to this quiet Jesuit men and women and their personal emotions, their loves, their ambitions, their humiliations, were as nothing but tools to be used, or pipes to be played upon, Nigel did not as yet even suspect—or perchance, had he suspected, might have craved leave to follow Tilly, where hard knocks were plentiful and blood ran freely, to take part in a visible strife and with open foes, men of like manner to himself.

"If you mean *this*!" said the Father gravely, lifting his crucifix from his breast to his lips. "No! Nor then! He will find work for my soul! But now," he went on in a changed voice, "I sent for you to send you on an errand. You are to be the tempter of Wallenstein."

"Surely you can choose a legate of more credit and authority than me!"

"Possibly, but not one more likely to elicit Wallenstein's candour."

"And how will he receive an ambassador of my humble station? Will he not rather deem it another

affront, and throw his weight wholly into the opposite scale?"

"As to rank, the Emperor is pleased with your behaviour as a regimental commander, and your courage and conduct in the battle and the retreat from Breitenfeld. Your patent as major-general is being made out. Wallenstein may appear cold. He may appear haughty, but you will let him understand that you are but the forerunner. You will explain that the Emperor is desirous of knowing first, whether His Grace the Duke of Friedland would be willing, should the occasion arise, to raise another army to oppose first Saxony, then Gustavus, on the part of the Empire, and in the second place, what conditions His Grace would expect to be fulfilled, and what powers must be included in his patent. Once the general extent of his demands are known a negotiation may be set on foot through channels which will safeguard his dignity."

The interview proceeded at some length, Father Lamormain laying down with great precision the details of the points on which Nigel was to touch.

"You will go to Prague ostensibly in command of reinforcements for the garrison, and to report to the Emperor the state of the defences of that city. In the ordinary course you will naturally beg the favour of being received by the Duke, and so gain his private ear."

"Having learned all you can, you will return with all speed, for events are moving quickly."

"I can but do my best," Nigel said in conclusion, "and that best may be poor. Meantime I crave the Emperor's patience, and the opportunity afterwards to gain his further favour in some military employment, for to tell the truth, Father, this embassy work is not suited to my bent. Though I can but thank the Emperor very

heartily for the honour he does me in reposing so much of his confidence in me."

So the interview ended as it had begun with a benediction, and the next day saw Nigel and a considerable body of troops, with a full complement of officers, set out for Prague.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ORBIT AND FOCUS.

THE best inn at Znaim was a solidly built and roomy and uncomfortable place. Znaim is on the road from Vienna to Prague, and is actually in the Mark of Mähren, neither in Austria nor Bohemia. Whether that was a reason why His Grace the Duke of Friedland should have affrighted, as much as overjoyed, the host of the Golden Fleece by his presence it is not possible to say, but he was there with an attendance of two gentlemen and six men-servants, not counting horse-boys. As he told no one why he was going to Znaim, or whether he was passing beyond Znaim, no one could satisfy the curiosity of the host, who having been warned by courier, had caused a large upper room to be swept, laid down a rug or two bought from a Hungarian trader, who had bought them from a Turk, and set a fire of logs roaring in the chimney by way of banishing the November damp.

The great man had arrived at midday, dined with his gentlemen, who had afterwards set off on some journey to the southward. Left alone, his men-servants dismissed for the time being, the Duke amused himself by making plans and calculations on sheets of paper, also by walking to and fro, and peering out of the misty casement. The

innkeeper took it into his head that the Duke was expecting some one.

And in the late afternoon, just as the Duke had called for candles, the door opened and the man-servant announced "the Countess Ottilie von Thüringen."

From a hood of deep blue velvet edged with sable, a slight colour in her cheeks from the wind, the mysterious eyes looked out expectant and almost timid, if timidity had not been almost a stranger to the woman to whom they belonged.

The grave cold face of Wallenstein relaxed into a smile of welcome. He bowed and kissed her hand.

"So you are on your way, Countess Ottilie! 'Tis a long while since we met."

"Six months! Albrecht! Six months of inglorious rust!" There was an undertone of reproach, very faint, perhaps scarcely meant. She was a woman.

The brow of Wallenstein resumed its furrows.

"You at least have not rusted," he said. "Quicksilver could rust as soon. You have been busy, my confederate. But indeed I have not been exactly idle. And we may say truthfully that our efforts have succeeded."

"In so far that Protestant Germany is aroused from end to end by the torch of Gustavus, and that the Catholic League was never so downcast as now."

"You say rightly that Gustavus applied the torch, but it is we who have gathered the dry faggots together and spread them on the common hearth!"

"Then you are pleased with me, Albrecht!" The wistfulness in her tone was quite apparent. For a moment the great lady was merged into the woman seeking approval from the man who sat upon the throne of her admiration.

"You are wonderful as well as beautiful!" said the Duke, not as a lover says these things, but with the air

of the connoisseur of minds, deeply surprised that he has discovered a masterpiece where he looked merely for an ordinary work of art.

She coloured at his words and smiled. They pleased her, glibly as they ran off his tongue, but with a lover's ardour to waft them into air how much more would they have pleased her!

"Yes!" She went on as if following out another thought. "Events are moving fast towards the point we aimed at, your recall."

"My recall? Yes! Six months ago I was dreaming of recall."

In an instant she leaned forward anxiously to ask—

"Of what then do you now think if not of recall? To what end are you planning? Towards what have I planned and journeyed and striven?"

Wallenstein felt the annoyance that all self-centred men feel at making others partners in their plans. But he showed nothing of it as he answered—

"Of a confederacy of all German states on the basis of complete religious liberty! It is of that I am thinking."

She threw back her hood and opened her cloak. Then she asked with an amused air—

"And for this it is necessary to *drive the Habsburgs over the Alps?*"

Something very like a gleam of impatience, if not of anger, shot into his eyes.

"Could such a confederacy take place and the Emperor Ferdinand consent?" he asked.

"No! Nor could it take place while the Order of Jesus exists."

"That also must go!" He showed plainly how indifferent it was. "But how did you learn so much of my intentions?"

"The dead gave up what the living had not sufficient

trust to reveal!" she said with some air of being hurt.

"So von Teschen is dead! At Breitenfeld?"

She nodded.

"He was a useful servant, but too rash! Still, I am sorry to have lost him!"

"Was it altogether worthy of Albrecht von Waldstein to wait the issue of a battle, and then to send congratulations to the victor?" The voice of Otilie von Thüringen conveyed sorrow. Her eyes, wide open, searched the Duke's face, which showed nothing.

"It is the handle of the sword I seek, not the point. There is nothing worthy or unworthy. Without a command I cannot sway a single state! I must begin by taking the sword by the handle."

"Your Grace seems to have forgotten the tenor of the compact made with a Habsburger, a rebel, but still a Habsburger. Let me remind you of it. The objective was the restoration of your Grace to the command of the armies of the Emperor, or of the Catholic League. To do this it was necessary to encourage the Protestant powers to attack, and the greater the danger to the Empire, the more sure would be your restoration. That accomplished, the sword once more in your hand, you were to demand the throne of Bohemia."

"And who says that my purpose does not hold?"

"Albrecht von Waldstein seems to say it. He talks of confederacies, of driving out the Habsburgs. He who aspires to sit beside a Habsburg upon a throne must first be worthy of her, and not diminish her worth in lowering the lustre of her family and her name!"

The splendid voice rang out with the pride and command of a great princess, rebuking a too aspiring courtier.

Wallenstein bowed to the utterance as to the throne

itself, but raising his head again and throwing back his wide shoulders replied—

“I have not forgotten, Otilie! But the Habsburg princess that would sit beside Wallenstein upon the throne of Bohemia derives her title from him. It is not Ferdinand of Arragon and Isabella of Castile, a joining of two monarchies. I confess that Europe holds but one princess, and that a Habsburger, who can be an equal mate by reason of her intelligence, her beauty, and her race, for Wallenstein, but she must learn that what he does is right. Forgive me if I set the matter out too harshly. No man ever played a greater game for greater stakes under auspices more divine; but Wallenstein must play it.”

The eyes of the Countess Otilie flashed in the light of the candles and the firelight as she turned her head to answer him.

But her answer died upon her lips, for the man-servant knocked and entered.

“A general officer from Vienna passing by with troops for Prague craves audience, your Grace!”

The Countess Otilie resumed her hood and sat down again by the fire. Wallenstein, anticipating no long interruption, understood that she would contrive to remain incognita while he admitted this stranger to a short audience.

Nigel Charteris entered.

As he came forward into the full light the Duke of Friedland started perceptibly.

“It is an omen! The circle, the oval, and the arc once more!” he muttered.

“Ah! Major-General! So *your* star mounts! Whilst *mine* flickers in a far-off sky.”

“I had thought to have found your Grace alone, Duke!” said Nigel, casting a glance at the hooded lady.

"She is like yourself and myself a chance traveller to Znaim. I know her. She is a friend before whom one may speak freely. What of the war?"

Nigel told briefly what was known in Vienna, what he guessed that Wallenstein already knew.

The lady spread out her long slender fingers to the fire. Nigel saw them without regarding them. He could not see her face, nor was he concerned to try. She was Wallenstein's affair.

Nigel did not wish to let the occasion slip, nor to lay too much stress upon it.

"In short," he said, after his recital of the position as a soldier understood it to explain to a soldier, "the affairs of the Emperor are in a serious plight, and he looks round for aid."

"Is not His Holiness the Pope sending him an army, or at least an aid?" asked Wallenstein.

"It is said that His Holiness has too much to occupy his troops in Italy," said Nigel. "Meantime Saxony is getting ready for the march."

"The winter will stop him!" said Wallenstein.

"He is like to winter in Prague!" said Nigel.

The lady by the fireplace may have shivered, or shrugged her shoulders in the least. A thought came to him that his prophecy might have gone home to the Duke more truly than he knew. It was at Prague that Wallenstein maintained a princely house. He must, in the event of the Saxons attacking Prague, submit to their dominance, a thing unpleasant and inconsonant with Wallenstein's character, or remove his household before their approach, or make an alliance with them and so cut himself entirely adrift from the Empire, or raise troops for the Emperor and defend the town. In any event out of the four he must make up his mind and act soon.

"To whom then does the Emperor look to save him from his enemies?"

"There is but one, your Grace, and that the Duke of Friedland!"

Again the lady at the hearth held out her fingers idly to the blaze, and Nigel's eyes following the action saw the red glow of the blood between them, and this time he marked their slenderness.

"The Emperor must needs bid high!" said the Duke. "And soon! The posture of affairs is not what it was. There must be no more talk of edicts! The time has come when there can be no more Catholic States and Protestant States but German States! If the Emperor becomes strong again through his armies, it can only be in order to be able to treat on a more equal footing. But what possible price can he offer me to forego my private peace, my ease, the enjoyment of my revenues, and submit to the harassments of raising an army? I speak not yet of a supreme command. Cæsar made war against the Gauls because he needed money before he could gratify his ambition. I do not need money."

Nigel noticed that the lady's head gave an impatient toss, as who should say, "What ails the man?"

"You do not covet the honour of the supreme command, and of driving Saxony back to his frontiers and the Swede across the Baltic?" Nigel said in genuine amazement.

"For what? To become again a private gentleman?"

"There would be the Turks next, who are even now talking of invading Hungary."

"More toil! More glory, if you like, or perhaps death in the course of the task. And again to what end if successful?"

"The great soldiers have never looked to the end when

they began their campaigns," Nigel replied, glowing; "but none of them has ever rested of his own will while great victories were yet to be won."

"The Emperor would scarce like to endow me with such powers as I should demand before I listened to him. There is but one Wallenstein. When the Emperor chooses to send his request in language plain and manifest, offering to confer such absolute power to raise him an army as I consider my least due, I will consider it. Till then I lift no finger, not even if the Saxons thunder at the doors of Prague. Tilly has failed. Pappenheim has failed, Maximilian will fail.

The lady at the hearth put up her long fingers to adjust the hood more closely to her head. This time Nigel saw them. He knew them. But were they Ottilie's or Stephanie's? The cloak? Where had he seen that? His heart beat faster. For an instant he forgot Wallenstein, the Emperor, the whole of his mission in the presence, the hidden presence, of Ottilie.

He sprang to her side. A curious cold smile lit up the face of Wallenstein.

"Ottilie!" Nigel exclaimed.

She threw back her hood, rose, faced him, held out her hands—

"Ottilie is no more! I am Stephanie!"

"No more?" Nigel murmured with quivering lips. "No more?"

"Stephanie was Ottilie when she followed the star of Wallenstein, worshipped his ambition and wrought as she did even to this day for his success. But no longer! She is satisfied. She could be one with the lofty spirit of a Cæsar but not with the bargaining, bartering craft of merchant Wallenstein, who asks what reward he shall

receive at the very hand that opens the gate of the Palace of Glory."

"I go to Vienna, Colonel Charteris, you to Prague. God speed you back again! Now if you will see me to my carriage I need no longer be a hindrance to the chaffering!"

It may be imagined what confusion this outburst, spoken in calm level tones, icy with suppressed passion, stirred in Nigel's mind. The pressure of her hands, the first look into his eyes, had told him that what he had ravished from a not unwilling Otilie was his from Stephanie, Archduchess though she was, when time and season were more propitious; and the blood beat into his face.

He bowed over her hands and went towards the door to give the order to the servants.

Then the Archduchess turned to Wallenstein—

"Adieu, Duke! Our astrologer's figure holds another meaning than the one we gave it. Bid him be more exact, and take into account what he has forgotten, the beatings of our hearts, . . . of those of us that have hearts!"

Wallenstein bowed low. His face showed nothing of what he felt.

"Adieu, your Highness! There is perhaps more in the spirit of Wallenstein than the merchant, more than the politician, more than the soldier. I give your Highness thanks for all your furtherance, while I deplore the rupture of the alliance, from which it is your Highness's pleasure to withdraw. Adieu!"

Nigel returned as the last word was spoken, and Wallenstein proceeded—

"Adieu also, General Charteris! My best wishes go with you! If His Imperial Majesty should inquire, you

have my authority to tell him in what state of mind you have found me, and nothing of what Her Highness has indiscreetly disclosed. I know that in all things I can rely upon your discretion."

Nigel gave him the assurance, and after a parting salutation led the Archduchess to her coach.

CHAPTER XXX.

LOVE AND A LOCKSMITH.

THE utter hopelessness of the affair was the first sane reflection that approached the gate of Nigel's mind as he journeyed on to Prague after the Archduchess had set out for Vienna. They would meet again. Yes, it was in the minds of both. They were only at the beginning. They would both go on. They had made no pledge to go on; but having exchanged looks, clasped hands no more, he had gone northward and she southward, and Nigel's first sane reflection, after the first glow of the supreme exaltation of spirit we call love had passed, was that in some way or other that journeying apart would be symbolical of their lives. He asked himself what would happen if some stranger from over seas, not being a prince of the blood, should in the Court of King Charles fall into a like passion for an English princess, were any old enough. He had no doubts upon the subject. The amorous fool would be despatched in haste to his native land. The princess would be dealt with by appointing a company of noble gaolers and a residence from which egress would be difficult, until a husband of the right hue of blood could be purchased for her, and there would be an end of youthful escapades. And Nigel knew that he in his own country would have approved. The Habsburgs

were, if anything, prouder than the Stuarts. What then could he, a Scot, a plain gentleman, who by a series of strokes of fortune had risen in the Imperial service to be a major-general, expect? Dismissal! And the Archduchess? The Elector or a convent. As yet, Nigel reflected, and this was after the first sane reflection set out above, as yet the secret, that secret that was more delicious, more thrilling than any in the world to them, lay in their own hearts.

He would cherish it. She would cherish it. In time to come they would make plans, wild hazardous resolutions. Would they find the courage to carry them out? He could answer for himself. Her history, as far as he knew it, answered for her. She had an equal courage, a haughty daring, a mind full of resource, and eyes that could stir him to any deed.

So he rode on to Prague and disposed his troops in the garrison and went round the defences with the commander of the garrison, making suggestions, sage and otherwise, and incidentally learned how unpopular the Emperor was: how he had quartered troops on Protestant hamlets, and enforced mass, torn lands from Protestant hands and handed them to Catholics, or those who said they were. The commandant was not hopeful as to the front they would present to Saxony. All Nigel could offer was vague encouragement that something was in the wind that would put a different complexion on the affairs of the Empire.

Then having accomplished his errand he returned to Vienna and found Father Lamormain eager to hear the result of the interview with Wallenstein.

This Nigel reported in a very few words, which Father Lamormain summed up by saying—

“You inferred, Colonel Charteris, that the Duke is willing to treat on conditions!”

"On conditions which he will impose himself!"

"And these are?"

"That the war is to be waged or not, as the necessity to redress the balance of power dictates, and that the settlement shall be on the basis of entire religious freedom for the Empire."

"That is the hardest condition! But we must needs bow to the tempest. Time will bring its own opportunities afterwards. And the next?"

"That all appointments of officers, from the highest downwards, shall be in the Duke's gift without the need of reference to Vienna."

"The Duke would be the fountain of honour, and every captain his sworn vassal. That is also a hard condition and smacks of Cæsarism!" the Jesuit commented. "Freedom he asks and power absolute while he exercises his functions, but for reward, what reward does he crave?"

"None that he spoke of to me!"

"Ah!" said the Jesuit reflectively. "We are bidden to distrust the Greeks and people bearing gifts. I am also inclined to look a little further when a man is willing to undergo great toil and asks nothing."

"There will be the spoil of the cities and the ransom of the prisoners!" said Nigel.

"The spoil of Stockholm?" the Jesuit inquired with a smile. "Now as to yourself, General. Will you stay here and take your chance of a command under Wallenstein, or join Tilly?"

"I would be where there is work to do!" said Nigel. "And Wallenstein may not name me!"

"You would have made a good regular had you been trained early," said the Father approvingly. "But some day woman will come into your life and divide it into the camps of love and duty."

For an instant a flush came into Nigel's cheeks and passed. Had she not come sooner than the Jesuit expected?

The interview ended, Nigel proffered a formal request to the War Department to be allowed to join General Tilly. As the permission did not depend upon the War Department so much as upon the Emperor, not upon the Emperor so much as Father Lamormain, still a few days elapsed before he could set out. Couriers were expected. Negotiations had been begun with Wallenstein with as much ceremony as if he had been a crowned head.

To any man less genuinely a man of action, this compulsory and to himself excusable dawdling in the very neighbourhood of the Archduchess, would have been a delightful interlude between the stern acts of war. Such a man would have had the capacity for idleness in some measure, and some knowledge how to enjoy it rather than employ it. He would, far more quickly than Nigel, have found a way to enjoy it, and to enjoy it in company with some beloved fair, or perhaps with several.

Nigel's love was a possession. The Archduchess, mysterious combination of Stephanie and Otilie, had the whole of his heart for her encampment. There was no little citadel or outward tower which her forces did not occupy. But as yet the exaltation of his love did not manifest itself in any outward signs. He neither talked more, as many lovers do, nor was more silent, as some are wont to be, nor manifested exceeding nor profuse gentleness, a manner unbecoming in a soldier. If any at Vienna had known him well, they might have thought him more self-contained than usual. He felt that he must needs keep a close-knitted grip upon himself, for he told himself that, if he should come within arm's length of the object of his worship, his will would be as the green withes that bound Samson, and his lips would incontinently pro-

fane the image of the goddess, as they had once before done when she had appeared under the humbler of her guises. That the Archduchess, on her side, might be as fully and completely woman as he was man, did not realise itself to him. It was not possible that it should. So that he did not picture her as beating her wings against the palace cage, whose wires were the servant spies, stifling or trying to stifle in her generous heart the desire to give of her womanhood with lavishness to him whom her imagination had crowned and enthroned in a vision of perfect man.

But where lover and beloved are within a bowshot length, and both are thirsty to gaze the one upon the other, both eager to exchange the story of their moods, surely the god Cupid will find a way to bring about their meeting.

And Love, who laughs at locksmiths, employed one. One noon, as he returned from some of his military duties, Nigel found an apprentice locksmith awaiting him in his quarters, whose grimy hand drew from his leathern apron a key bright from its new forging and chasing by the tools. Nigel, being asked by the lad if it pleased him, replied with the wonderful presence of mind Dan Cupid gives, that it pleased him well. It was the duplicate of the key of that orchard close within the gardens of the palace.

The place was no longer in doubt. Where Colonel Charteris had been received in jocund May by the Archduchess, Nigel would meet Stephanie in hoar December. And the hour? Love dictated that the first hour of dusk was the first possible, and the first possible was the one of which Love must avail himself.

To gain access to the gardens by night it was necessary to reach them by one of the doors which led from one of the lower corridors of the palace into the orangery,

and by one of those of the orangery into the garden terrace.

That afternoon Nigel spent an hour not unprofitably in the orangery examining the trees, learning their history from the gardeners, and where the keys hung by which one might let one's self out into the terrace.

By this time his face and figure were too well known to the pages or the domestics of the palace to excite remark, and he easily contrived an errand to one of the officers on guard in the palace, which made it reasonable for him to be seen passing along the corridor in question and returning. But on his return he took the left hand into the orangery instead of the right into the courtyard, and an instant sufficed for him to find the key and let himself out on to the terrace.

By what means the other conspirator would reach the rendezvous he did not know, but from the rambling building of the palace many doors led into the gardens. Few of them showed any trace of usage, but one no doubt led to the private apartments of the Archduchess.

Once more the moon befriended him, but this time she seemed to Nigel to be like himself, or perhaps more justly like his mistress. For, fitfully gleaming, now wholly to be seen, now half in shadow, now again wholly lost, the moon seemed to scurry from one clot of cloud, ragged and grey and wintry, to another hiding-place still more opaque, and always scurrying. Nigel knew well it was the wind in the upper air that drove the clouds across her face, but the image pleased him as he went by purposely circuitous ways towards the orchard close, his key securely in his pocket, his cloak wrapped round him, his hat pulled down well across his brows, his sword in its place at his side.

There was nothing languorous about this night, nothing effeminate but the moon. But in chill December, as in

soft breathing June, an assignation with a maid is as fruitful of lovers' walks and the exercise of lovers' patience.

So he drew near to the orchard close, and paused in the shadows before he set key to lock.

Now that he was so near he felt more of love's awe. He wondered if it had been some rustic maiden—Elspeth Reinheit, for example—he would have felt it. But of Elspeth Reinheit he had never felt in such a way. Many maidens in many places had cast questioning, subtly troubling, glances at him, and always till he had seen her, whom he had deemed Otilie the mysterious, their glances had fallen from him like spent arrows from a buckler. She alone was above all different in kind, a creature of a lone world where he was a hardy adventurer. He was a new Pizarro penetrating a deserted temple of the Incas, and finding a solitary priestess whose lofty mien and more than human beauty forbade him to desecrate the sanctuary, while she chanted in an unknown tongue songs of infinite allurement.

He thrust the key into the lock.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AN ASSIGNATION.

THE lock yielded. The door opened. But the walk was bare as far as the fitful moonlight showed. He strode forward almost as if he feared an ambush, though at this part of the garden the short bare trees and standards made but the cover of a spider's-web tracery, through which one sees what is beyond. Only towards the middle of the orchard was there a spot where several walks met, and this was nearly surrounded by evergreen bushes and laurel and holly. This alone loomed blackly in front of him. Towards this he strode. And even as he gained the entrance a tall figure of a woman, cloaked and hooded, emerged from the encompassing dusk, and coming nearer, revealed itself as that of the Archduchess.

Dimly Nigel divined that she wore the deep blue velvet and sable furs which he had seen aforetime. More clearly he distinguished in the depths of the hood the dancing of those lustrous eyes, the pouting red lips of that royal mouth, the pallor of the cheeks.

He took her hand to kiss, but she bent forward with a look of enticement.

"Nay! tall captain!" she said. "We need not use the fashion of the courts. It was not so you kissed Otilie, or so she told me."

But nevertheless she tendered but her cheek, in token, as he understood it, that she had but surrendered the furthest outworks. That vain imagining of his, that to be within arm's length of her was to throw the reins upon the neck of passion and let it gallop, had vanished when he put the key in the lock.

Woman the queen, woman the giver and the withholder, leaned graciously towards him by reason of the love that had descended upon her, abasing her to him, exalting him to her, banishing all thrusting rebellious swashbuckling imaginations from the presence. Tumultuous his thoughts sprang towards speech, but little could he find but an almost breathless—

“Stephanie! Of all living men to choose me for your lover?”

“Nay! tall captain!” Craftily she had ranged herself beside him and rested her hand upon his shoulder, looking up into his eyes with her face of roguish wooer. “Nay! tall captain! You had already taken my sister-half, Ottilie, by assault, and it is not seeming that an Archduchess should be bussed by more than one bold fellow, so I even proffer my cheek to the same smiter for honour's sake.”

The tone of raillery set him at his ease. He felt that beneath it beat the true womanly heart. And over him stole a great, a measureless content.

He took her left hand in his, and holding so much of her closely to his side, they began to walk here and there about the orchard by first one and then another of its many paths.

“It is amazing that I did not guess your riddle before, my love,” he said.

“Count Tilly guessed it at Magdeburg!” she said. “But he feigned not to, thinking doubtless it would be as well my madcap freaks should not come to the Emperor through him.”

"But you put on a different seeming! The voice was like, but the language of Ottilie was different, smacked of the country lady. The face of Ottilie was like that of the Archduchess, but the manner and bearing were less haughty and less assured."

"But the truth was that you saw me in distant places and in changed circumstances, so that you were prone to think of me as two distinct women."

"And now tell me the meaning of this masquerade! It was for Wallenstein! I am sure of that! You were in love with Wallenstein?"

"Never! You are going to be my first lover and my last!" Her tone was deep and serious. There was something of presage, of mystery, a hint of doom.

"I was taken, as a girl will be, with the glamour that glowed about his name, as he rose from step to step by great leaps of success. It was the star of Wallenstein that I followed. I dreamed of being caught up into its orbit, and, moving, throned above the nations in its company, sharing and contributing to its brightness."

"And Wallenstein? Did he know?"

"Wallenstein knew that I was favouring his party and his plans. He knew that I was willing to run terrible risks, as I have done, to forward his aims. But Wallenstein is a merchant, not a prince, a politician, not a man! The glamour became more transparent as time went on, and when I met you, Nigel, it was as if a wind from the hills swept over the plain, sweeping away the mists of morning and leaving everything clear and visible. For you showed yourself a man. You were not old and full of wiles like Father Lamormain or Maximilian. You were not like a mere courtier, as so many that I have known are, ready to agree to this and that and everything. You withstood me, thwarted me, outplayed me."

"Not always, Stephanie! There was a castle called the Wartburg!"

At this reminiscence the Archduchess flushed beneath her hood, which Nigel did not see. But he felt the sly pinch that accompanied her cry.

"Speak not of it! You took more away with you than you brought!" The hood was turned up towards him now, and he could look down into the depths of those translucent womanly eyes, brimming with the tenderness of first love, more magical than which is nothing of human tenderness.

"And I," said Nigel, "had never loved woman till I saw you in the Pastor's house at Magdeburg. It was as if a bee had stung me. I felt the sharp prick, told myself it was naught. But the poison worked. At Erfurt, when I knew it was you that had wept in the cathedral, and we stood by the bridge looking at the rivers and the stars and heard you speak of love, I recognised the pain again, I knew the longing that had set in, but also, knowing that you spoke not of me, again I brushed the thought aside. But never for long. . . . Something seemed to come into his mind. . . ." He paused awhile, the Archduchess hanging upon his next words, savouring the essence of what had gone before. . . .

"Who stole my despatches?"

"The same hand that restored them! Speak not of them!"

"I wondered if I had awakened what would have happened!"

"A woman's wit——"

"Would have been little proof against a man's sword-thrust in the dark," said Nigel sternly.

"I will not run such a risk again," she said with humility, "unless it be to save you!"

"Foolish princess!" he rejoined, and held her sud-

denly in his arms. "You are bewitched! And so am I." This time there was no pretence of offering a cheek. It was a fortunate dark shadow in which they stood, and lips levied toll of lips, and were not satisfied with the rate of customs. Heart beat to heart and beat the more, but Nigel's reverence for her, for all he held her so closely, was as high as her greatness of soul.

"It is enough, tall captain, and yet not enough. But our plans! We have already spent a foolish hour and made no plans."

Her warning tumbled Nigel headlong out of his tower to an ungrateful earth. Plans to what end?

"Oh, Stephanie! My princess! To-morrow or the next day or the next I must set out for Tilly's army. A plan to see you, to hold you, what need I but this key and your sweet graciousness?"

"Once to meet you in my orchard close! Once was easy and possible. But do you think we could meet twice and not be spied upon. I know the palace of Vienna and its ways as you can never know them. Spies of Father Lamormain, hirelings of Maximilian's, hirelings of France and Spain."

"And your love is a great and precious jewel," said Nigel, "too great, too precious to be jeopardised."

"If you would wear it and me forever," . . . she murmured, "we must hide it now, peeping at it now and then in secret, till the time is ripe to run the great risk of our lives and proclaim it in the ears of the court and of Europe. Whether it will be a convent or death for me, or death for you and me, for I would die rather than wed Maximilian, or life for both of us, is hidden behind the shadows as the dark encircles us now. But we must not barter our chances for any trifling joy——"

"It is no trifling joy, Stephanie! This, save the mark, is heaven to hold you to my heart."

"Oh! Nigel! Nigel!" she sighed. "Your love is the love of a man that comes and goes in gusts, roaring like the wind, gentle as the breeze, and then it is gone till it awakens again. I say not you are inconstant, but you do not fear, as woman does, the hour of emptiness when there is no lover, no husband."

"By Heaven! I am no inconstant, Stephanie! I can bide my time, and if I lose not my life in these wars, surely there shall be a roof-tree in bonnie Scotland waiting us."

"To-morrow, all being well, the Archduchess shall send for Colonel Charteris to the Long Gallery, but for a brief talk of the affairs of state. The following evening I shall try to meet you here at the same time to say farewell. But remember how we may be beset, and use a double caution. Look for a way into the gardens by another avenue than the palace. Now I leave you! Do not follow! Wait a full half-hour! Make sure you are not spied upon! Make a wide circuit to the orangery and have a glib excuse if you are met. Good-night."

For a brief half-hour Nigel waited, exploring the orchard close. There were two other gates, by one of which the Archduchess had beaten her retreat. No sign of any lurking spy made itself apparent. This time Cæsar's daughter had escaped suspicion, and the lovers had their precious hour of interlude.

Nigel's mind was more at rest after he had made the circuit of the place and sounded every shadow by the aid of the fitful moon. More than ever alive to the privilege of her love, he was equally alive to the danger that she ran. Histories and mysteries of the courts of Italy, of Spain, of France, sprang to life in his mind, things read, or heard in the guard-room, or handed down in fearsome stories of the hearth at home. The fairy princess had been folded in his arms, had breathed kisses of mortal joy

upon his lips, had gone. If she were not a fairy princess, then a thousand unknown dangers threatened them. He could guess Maximilian as one very possible architect of evil; only Maximilian was just then preparing to defend Bavaria, and could know nothing if the very wind shouted "Nigel and Stephanie." Father Lamormain was another, nearer home, absolutely inexorable in working out his plans. At present in ignorance of this princely indiscretion he was friendly towards Nigel, but let him gain an inkling and Nigel felt that their projects of happiness would be thwarted by means impossible for himself and her to foresee and to avoid.

As he turned the key in the lock and took one farewell look of that wintry orchard before closing the gate behind him his mind was full of joy; and as the gate closed joy fled before foreboding.

CHAPTER XXXII.

PASTOR RAD AGAIN.

AFTER the victory of the Lutheran faith at Breitenfeld, Pastor Rad had found himself without a definite mission. In his enthusiasm he had made his way to the camp of Gustavus at Werben and marched with the Swedes to that field of triumph, using such opportunities as occurred to labour by way of exhortation and of prayer. So that his sonorous voice was lifted up, it mattered little who listened or regarded. At first the Swedes, drafted into whose ranks were many Brandenburgers, Pomeranians, and Saxons, listened to, if they only imperfectly understood, his vociferous ministrations. But after Breitenfeld the jealousy of the Swedish native ministers, who had at the beginning, while the issue was uncertain, held out the right hand of fellowship, manifested itself, and he was made to understand that his presence with the Swedish portion of Gustavus' army was superfluous. That army speedily moved onwards towards the west, and Pastor Rad, having reached Erfurt along with it, considered it a suitable opportunity for making his way back to Eisenach, where his flock, and his livelihood, lay peacefully enfolded in the forest.

His reception did not savour of fervency. The interest of utterly rural communities in external events happening

a hundred miles away is hard to kindle, and, when kindled, needs much application of the bellows to keep it at a red heat. Magdeburg had fired them. His own narratives and sermons had blown up their sparks to a blaze, but, with the marching of a small body of their young men to join Gustavus, the countryside had returned to its arduous agricultural pursuits, to its wood chopping and charcoal burning, to its smithies and its inns.

"Here comes Pastor Rad!" said Jacob Putkammer, the tailor. "Now we shall hear!"

"About Breitenfeld?" was the pastor's eager question. "It was glorious."

"Yes! Yes! The Swede beat Tilly till there was not a whole suit of clothes in his army! We know all that."

"What we want to know," said Marx Englehart, the smith, "is what has become of Elspeth Reinheit?"

"Elspeth Reinheit?" queried the pastor in astonishment.

"You remember, pastor, how you set about driving the devil out of her! Over yonder at Ruhla!"

The pastor flushed at the remembrance.

"Yes! Didn't some soldier come interfering and carry her off?" said the smith. "I wasn't there. I had too much to do at the time to make a holiday."

"Holiday! Marx!" said the pastor sternly. "It was a solemn duty we had to perform, and we were shamefully interrupted."

The tailor's eyes glinted as he said—

"I can picture him now dusting your gown for you!"

The pastor looked, as he felt, very angry.

"I don't know what became of her."

"Well!" said the smith, "I shouldn't advise you to go too near old Reinheit, her father. He's in an awful fume against you, pastor. Of course at the time he thought it

was all for her good, but he did not expect you would go to the length of whipping the poor girl."

"How else should one persuade the devil out of a woman?" asked Pastor Rad.

"Ah!" said the tailor. "We are not learned in these matters. Now if you had been married to her, no one would have complained. There is no better way."

"There was a good deal of talk before that that you were cocking your cap at her!" said the smith slowly.

"And might have done worse! Old Reinheit's got a fine stocking of gold somewhere, and look at his farm," said the tailor.

"Lay not up for yourselves——" began the pastor.

"That's all very well!" said the tailor. "But a good-looking wench, even if she has got a devil, is none the worse for having a rich father. *She* didn't lay up the treasure. Besides, I wouldn't give half a batz for a woman who hadn't got a bit of the devil in her."

"Come! come! Jacob!" said the pastor. "Your tongue speaketh of vanity as your trade does. As for Nicholas Reinheit, I shall even go up to his house and comfort him."

"Well!" said the smith. "It is only just and manly so to do, but look after your skin, for he is a man who can still use his hands if he is a bit over sixty."

A good many people met Pastor Rad as he went through the town to Nicholas Reinheit's farm, and every one of them asked him—

"Where is Elspeth Reinheit?"

And some careless people even put it in this way—

"What have you done with Elspeth Reinheit?"

It was bad enough to be asked where she was. It was iniquitous that he should be taxed with having put her away.

It was not very strange that Pastor Rad should not have known what had become of Elspeth. He had seen Nigel carry her off. That was all of a piece with his own unworthy suspicions of Elspeth's character. As to her after-fate Pastor Rad had very little doubt of that. She would have been abandoned in some city to her own wretchedness and shame, not daring to return home. All armies left a track of human litter that had once been spotless maidens and chaste wives. He felt himself aggrieved at his own personal loss. He had fully intended to wed Elspeth in due time and inherit as much as he could of Nicholas Reinheit's wealth. Nicholas the farmer had not been overmuch in favour of the idea, but old Pastor Reinheit, the girl's uncle, who had died at Magdeburg, was desirous that the wedding should come about. Altogether Pastor Rad was not very eager to meet the girl's father, but the tailor and the smith, who represented public opinion in Eisenach, had led him in his haste to declare that he would face Nicholas, and he would. Pastor Rad's consciousness of his own honesty of purpose upheld him.

Nicholas gave him a grudging "good-day!" He was a stoutly built, rather fat man, but anxiety had perceptibly thinned him, and his cheeks hung loose and baggy.

"The Lord comfort you in your affliction!" said Pastor Rad.

The old man turned on him with a snarl—

"It is easy to say. You took away my daughter. You set some silly tale going about her being possessed till the countryside demanded that she should suffer discipline. Fool! It was you that was possessed. And you set about giving her a public whipping, my daughter Elspeth, as good and true a maid as ever walked, and all those mawkish fools of elders and hugger-muggers sitting in a ring all about you mum and not lifting a finger."

"The discipline has been found efficacious in cases of possession!" said Pastor Rad.

"Very likely," retorted Nicholas, "where some servant girl has gone distraught and howled like a wolf up and down the village, or an old witch has given a man's horse the murrain. Whip 'em! Burn 'em! Drown 'em. But my daughter Elspeth! And then forsooth one of the Emperor's captains takes her out of your hands and rides away with her, and you with your three or four hundred men with muskets and pikes never move a finger. Where is she now? Tell me that! Is she alive or dead? You professed to have a liking for her at one time. Why, man, if you had had a spark of love in you, you would have followed that captain's troops till you dropped! Pastor! Pastor means shepherd, doesn't it? What manner of shepherd are you that lets the wolf snatch his lamb out of his very fingers?"

Nicholas spat solemnly on the hearth.

"You forget," expostulated Pastor Rad, "that there were above three hundred troopers, well armed and well horsed. We should have been cut in pieces."

"And would they have gone scathless? Has the forest lost all its manhood?"

"What was done or left undone cannot be remedied!" said the pastor.

"Did you know the man?" the farmer asked after a pause.

"Yes, it is the same fellow, a Scot, so they told me, who broke into the house at Magdeburg!"

"And saved all your lives, so Elspeth told me! 'Tis a pity he saved yours!"

"Friend Nicholas! You are too much beside yourself with grief. I was but an instrument of God."

"He rode with you to Erfurt, as I mind," the farmer went on. "Did he treat Elspeth as a light o' love?"

As a matter of fact, the pastor had been too much engaged in the contemplation of his coming sermons to remember, so he answered truthfully enough—

“I noticed nothing unseemly in his behaviour either to Elspeth or to Otilie von Thüringen!”

“It may be that the captain but took her to a place of safety, thinking her in danger!” said the farmer, growing more placid as the thought sprang up that there was ground for hope. “I remember a regiment staying near here the night after your hocus-pocus at Ruhla. They came at nightfall, and with the dawn, or soon after, an officer came riding helter-skelter down the hill from the Wartburg with a single soldier after him, and in half an hour they mounted and rode away. Maybe he was the very man.”

“But if he brought Elspeth thither why did he not send her to you?” propounded Pastor Rad.

“Because the girl would have had more sense than to get in your path again!”

“As if I had no work of the Lord’s to do, where the hosts of the Lord were drawn out unto battle?”

“Depend upon it,” said the farmer, “Elspeth’s in the Wartburg hiding!”

The pastor shook his head. He would have liked to know that she was. After all, there was an air of solid comfort about old Reinheit’s abode, sadly marred by the lack of Elspeth’s trim figure in coif and apron trotting to and fro. The more he thought of it the more he wanted to see her. At last he said—

“It may be that the Lord will vouchsafe light. I will go even unto the Wartburg and question the Landgravine, if peradventure she knows where the maiden is.”

“You need not darken my door again if you find her not,” said Nicholas Reinheit. “She can milk against any maid, make butter against any maid or wife in the forest,

bake against any, brew against any. God in heaven! she must come back. And I shan't go to the church till she does."

Pastor Rad was too much surprised to say anything. For Nicholas had been a very steadfast pillar of the Church, and it boded ill for Pastor Rad if he did not succeed in restoring the lost lamb to the fold.

So he picked up his staff and trudged thoughtfully away up the steep path to the Wartburg.

But the quest did not end there. For the Landgravine told him that the Lady Ottilie von Thüringen had taken Elspeth away with her when she set out for Halberstadt, which was the next day, or the next day but one, after the Emperor's colonel had brought her.

This news acted like a spur upon Pastor Rad. He stayed long enough to send word by one of Reinheit's cowherds that he had learned something about Elspeth and had gone to find her. If he heard nothing of Elspeth, at least he was sure of getting trace of the Lady Ottilie, who had many threads of connection with the Protestant leaders in various places. And he did not have to go farther than Erfurt before he received some information which caused him to return southward and set his face towards Bohemia.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE PASTOR'S PILGRIMAGE.

THE Archduchess Stephanie had rightly counted on a safe journey from Halberstadt to Bohemia, however small an escort she might be accorded. For, as the Countess Otilie von Thüringen she claimed safe conduct whenever there was any risk of getting embroiled with small bodies of Protestant levies, and her escort was far too mindful of its own safety to risk giving any other account of her than she chose to give.

As it was a matter of knowledge to the chief conspirators in each place that she was a medium of communication between Wallenstein and the Protestant leaders, her name was sufficient to guarantee her safety through country patrolled by their troops.

So it was the track of the Countess Otilie von Thüringen that Pastor Rad picked up at Erfurt. He learned that she had an escort of twenty Imperial troopers: that she had in her train several women servants or companions, the information not being very exact or well-defined: that she was making her way to Prague.

To Prague, then, the pastor made his way easily enough. The man that had come through the fires at Magdeburg and run innumerable risks at Breitenfeld,

although not himself using the arms of the soldiery but only spiritual weapons, was in a measure a kind of prodigious heroic creature, and fared well accordingly. Much talking and preaching made him exceedingly hungry, and the farmers and burghers, who one after the other housed and fed him, were as much amazed at, and respected him as a trencherman, a thing they were well able to judge of, as they were at his exploits, of which they were, in truth, obliged to take the greater part at his own telling.

Prague was in a great turmoil. For bruit of the advance of the Saxon troops was in every mouth, though no one knew anything for certain. Indeed Pastor Rad knew as well as any one, though he kept his own counsel. The way of things was indeed greatly to his liking. The Lutherans were getting the upper hand, just as but a short year before the Catholics had done. It was in this wise. The Catholics had learned that no sufficient aid could reach them from Vienna. They had looked for Wallenstein to organise their defence, and had he chosen to raise his own banner, it is possible that a sufficient force of Catholic gentry and their retainers could have been mustered that, together with the Imperial garrisons, might have given the Saxons a very long pause.

But to the amazement of all, Wallenstein dismantled his house, collected his furniture in waggons and his household in coaches, and set out without haste towards Vienna. In fact, he rested at Znaim. This had given the signal for something like panic, and although it was the dead of winter, Catholic family after Catholic family followed in his wake, each departure making it still more difficult for the next, and creating confusion through the desperate efforts of each not to be the hindermost.

From the innkeepers Pastor Rad learned that the Countess Ottilie had rested but a night and gone on to

Znaim, which being learned, the pastor could not resist the temptation of spending a day or two in the congenial company of the Lutherans of Prague, proving how well he could bray out prophetic denunciations against the fleeing Catholics. As he took his daily stand near the south gate of the city, his exuberant yellow locks floating in the wind, he was able to assail with his scriptural invective all the fugitives, with the certainty that some of his words at least would be, if not exactly treasured, at all events remembered by dint of his unwearied reiteration.

It was only when the burghers of Prague, tenacious of their privileges and of the well-ordering of their city, even with the dismal prospect before them of an occupation by their friends the Saxons, awakened to a sense of the unseemliness of his clamour, that Pastor Rad remembered the Lady Ottilie and Elspeth Reinheit, whose father was so well-to-do.

Once again he took staff in hand and trudged on to Znaim. At Znaim the host could only say that the Lady Ottilie had set out a full month before for Vienna.

He looked blank at the prospect. But he was by nature persistent, and unwilling to give up his search, which was now somewhat uninviting. Vienna meant Popery rampant, Jesuits in scores, rough soldiery, not rougher than usual, but with the licence of authority to subject a mere Lutheran pastor to all kinds of insults. There would be Lutherans even in Vienna, but those few and needy, and for companions on the road he would overtake the very Catholics he had so denounced.

Of money he had no great store, but he had contrived some replenishing of his purse at Prague, and husbanded his money as much as possible, taking advantage of every opportunity that offered of a free meal. In this way he accomplished the journey without much interruption, a

few hard blows from the servants of those who remembered his oratory at Prague, excepted.

Vienna with its populace, as it seemed to him, speaking all the tongues except German and curiously garbed, thronging with priests and nuns and soldiers, stared at him, professed not to understand his speech. He slunk into the first inn that offered a semblance of refuge and frugal fare at a modest price. Having slept as well as he was able, he set out the next morning to find the Lady Ottilie von Thüringen.

Having first approached some of his own belief and discovered that they knew nothing of her, not even her name, he accosted some of the better class of burgesses, who showed him greater courtesy than he expected, but could give him no information. Failing with the citizens, he addressed himself with more politeness than he was in the habit of using (he had no very abundant stock in his wallet) to some of the gentlemen who aired themselves and their newest raiment in the principal streets. One or two of them manifested sufficient interest to take note of the name on their tablets and asked him to describe the lady, which he did with much particularity. These having heard, dismissed him with a vague negative, but left a disturbing impression on his mind that they knew more than they pretended.

Two days went by in this manner and in losing his way and finding it in the tortuous streets of the city. On the third day, however, he saw, as he stood gazing at the palace of the Emperor, an officer of high rank, as it seemed, come out and mount his horse which had been held by a soldier at the entrance.

The pastor's eyes roved wearily over this new subject, noting with contemptuous attention the plumed hat, the gold lace galloons and other striking embellishments, when something familiar in the officer's features or

attitude came home to his consciousness. Then he recognised Nigel as the miscreant of Magdeburg, who had given him that never-to-be-forgotten chastisement.

Pulling his hat over his brows the pastor followed Nigel to his lodgings, and from midday till dusk he watched, following when Nigel set out, waiting when he returned. In what way he was to come at his desired end he did not know; but his old suspicion that between Nigel and Elspeth was some dark secret understanding had leapt to his mind with renewed vigour. It was a great joy to him when at dusk Nigel once more emerged, wrapped in a military cloak, bent upon some, so the pastor judged, furtive errand.

The dusk that favoured Nigel favoured him also. He followed with all the sleuth-hound in his composition, alert and noiseless. He wanted no second rencontre with that energetic Scot, but he did want to know very much whither he was bound.

He had much ado to keep pace, for Nigel walked quickly, but the pastor was a sturdy man and young. He kept well up and always in the shadow. The road lay away from the main streets into meaner ones, then left the houses altogether. On the left lay the city walls, furnished now and again with guard-houses, and defensive angles, and projections. On the right was a high bank, surmounted by a wall, of what height or thickness he could not gauge.

At a certain point Nigel stopped, looked round a moment, and then began to climb the bank. The pastor stood in the nearest shadow at the foot and watched till Nigel was at the top. Then the darkness was too much for him. Very stealthily the pastor climbed too. He was not a forest man for nothing. At the top it was clear that Nigel had disappeared. He must therefore have climbed the wall.

The wall was high, about twice the height of a man, with a coping-stone at the top, pent-house-wise, and grown thickly with moss and lichen and wild flowers. The wall was also rough, and the little clumps of moss showing in the interstices marked uneven places of which a climber might take advantage if he had long fingers and stout toes. But how to get off the ground was a problem. For a few moments he groped, half inclined to impute to "the Popish captain," as he called him, the sin of witchcraft, in addition to those of greed, unchastity, impiety, and a string of others of which the pastor was satisfied already. Then something that flicked him in the face, to wit, the leafless bough of a tree, brought him the solution. To spring for one a little above his head, and use it for a hand-grip while he stepped from toe-place to toe-place, and finally could dig his fingers securely into a great clump of moss at the coping with his right hand and haul himself up, took but a short interval of time. The getting down was not difficult.

The darkness had swallowed up Nigel. The grass made his footfall noiseless. The pastor's eyes, accustomed to the half darkness of the forest, were well fitted to the task at present. They enabled him merely to avoid or to thread the tangle of the bushes and get more and more into the open where the sky, now starlit, now cloudy by turns, allowed him a longer vision. At last he saw that the belt of grassland dotted by bushes was succeeded by formal walks and beds for flowers. A mile or so ahead he caught fitful glimpses of lights in some tall pile of buildings, which he conjectured to be the palace. These must be the demesnes of the Emperor's dwelling-place. His Popish captain was bent upon a rendezvous, doubtless with Elspeth. But where? Cautiously he stalked along making a straight line for the palace, keeping to turf or soft flower-beds by preference, and every now and then

standing in the shadow of a sapling to seek for the amorous pair, to listen for the whispers that might betoken their presence. And so going farther and farther he came to a hedge, behind which was another wall, this time of no great height, but still sufficient. Along this he crept seeking for a gate. Here was a garden close for growing fruit, he argued, and the lovers might well have left a door unfastened in their eagerness. But having made the circuit and discovered three doors all secure, he found he must prove again his skill in climbing. The wind blowing just sufficiently to make the twigs and boughs keep up a low whistling, made it impossible to judge where he should make his attempt. So he selected the corner with an eye to an easy ascent. Once upon the wall he paused, lying flat and clasping its top with both hands.

There he lay listening with both ears, trying to get used to the whispering of the branches till he could distinguish the tones of human murmuring. Then he dragged himself along a few more yards.

Pastor Rad felt that Providence was with him. His motive was excellent in his own eyes. He was engaged in the pursuit of the evil-doer. What he should do when he had found him was not at present clear. Providence would point out by process of revelation what the next step should be.

For the time being he crawled to the detriment of his clothing along the wall. His patience and his stealth, the latter not usually mentioned in connection with Providence, were rewarded. He heard voices, a man's and a woman's.

The one was that of the ruthless Catholic Scotsman, the betrayer of Elspeth Reinheit. Had he not cause to remember its deep tones? The other was not Elspeth's. For a few instants he was at a loss. They were also deep

and rich and aristocratic; the words they uttered were choice rather than homely. Then something in them recalled the very woman he was seeking, Otilie von Thüringen.

At this moment when he waited for the inspiration he expected, an untoward interruption befell. He dislodged a large stone, which fell with a very noticeable thud on the inner side of the wall, and he was at the same time clutched by the leg, and very unceremoniously pulled to the ground on the outside of the wall by a pair of ruffians, who, with a choice garnishment of oaths growled under their breaths, proceeded first to rifle his pockets quite thoroughly, and then to bind his arms behind his back, his legs together, and to lay him, so trussed, on his back. Then they began to clamber up the wall, only to find that the love-birds they had come to seek had flown.

Pastor Rad wriggled in vain while his captors explored the orchard close, and at the end of their fruitless search they returned, untied his legs and marched him firmly and rudely towards the palace, where they placed him in a guard-room, satisfied that if they had missed a salmon they had at least caught a dog-fish.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

LUTHERAN AND JESUIT.

THE officer of the guard at the palace was not clear as to what he was to do with his unintended catch. The fact that he was, or styled himself, a Lutheran pastor, was, in Vienna, in the eyes of such an officer, a criminal offence in itself. In addition, he had been caught upon the wall of the orchard close in the gardens of the palace.

Upon examination he proved to be reticent even to moroseness. His only explanation was that he had come to Vienna in search of a high-born lady, the Countess Ottilie von Thüringen. The officer of the guard had never heard of her, and till the morning had no one to consult. So Pastor Rad spent an uncomfortable night. His supper was meagre. The stone floor of the guard-room was hard, and the wind swept in under the massive door and up the capacious chimney, incidentally swirling round the Pastor's head and shoulders on its way. Half a dozen soldiers, who smelt very vilely, sat round the fire and played cards with great zest, and with oaths the most blood-curdling that Pastor Rad, who had heard many things spoken in his lifetime, had ever heard. He slept badly.

The next day Father Lamormain, who heard of everything, heard of this incident and sent for Pastor Rad.

It was the mark of Father Lamormain that he was uniformly courteous. He kept all his hatred under lock and key. And his hatred of Lutheranism was perhaps the profoundest passion of his life, next to the love he bore to his own order of the regular priests. If Father Lamormain could have gathered all the Lutheran ministry together, and compounded them into one man, and severed that man's head from his body, he would have acquiesced in that monstrous execution, without personal gratification, but with a sense that the most desirable of events had come to pass. But to address an individual Lutheran (minister and layman were alike to him) with a frown, with harsh speech, or even with mild contempt, was impossible to him.

Pastor Rad, unkempt as to his abundant yellow hair, muddy as to his raiment, presented an object for easy ridicule. Father Lamormain's secretary led him in with an air of apology. The Emperor's confessor requested him to be seated, and asked him if he had broken his fast. Pastor Rad, much taken aback by his reception at the hands of this renowned enemy of his faith, said No! Father Lamormain bade his secretary give him what he needed, and bring him back in an hour.

The secretary, understanding all his instructions implied, brought him back washed, combed, brushed, and recognisable as a Lutheran pastor as far as externals went.

Pastor Rad was greatly mollified by these attentions, and found grace enough to return thanks.

"And now," said Father Lamormain, "you will pardon me, Pastor Rad, if I ask you a few questions. You came to Vienna from Prague?"

"Yes!" said the pastor.

"At Prague, I understand, you found it necessary to speed some of the Catholic fugitives with exhortations?"

Pastor Rad admitted it. On reflection this seemed to be a gentle description of his sonorous revilings; but he wondered how much Father Lamormain knew and how he knew it. He also considered that it behoved him to be careful.

"May I ask you what brought you to Prague?"

"In search of one, a maiden, named Elspeth Reinheit, a member of my flock from Eisenach."

"How did she come thither?"

"I had learned that she set out for Prague in company of a certain Countess Otilie von Thüringen."

"Yes?"

"I learned that the Countess had set out for Vienna, and followed."

"Truly a good shepherd!" said Father Lamormain pleasantly. "You left the ninety-and-nine at Eisenach to discover your one lost lamb in Vienna!"

"And this Countess?"

"No one knows her in Vienna!"

"So you went to look for her in the orchard close in the palace gardens?"

Pastor Rad hesitated. Then he said—

"I did not seek her there. But she was there!"

"Yes!" said Father Lamormain. "You saw her!"

"No, I heard her voice!"

"So you knew her voice?"

"Yes, I had met her in Magdeburg during the siege!"

"She is a Lutheran also?"

"She consorted with the Lutherans! I know nothing of her except that she has been at the Wartburg staying with the Landgrave's family."

Pastor Rad suddenly began to suspect that he was too confidential.

"She is evidently a lady of rank!" said the Jesuit. "She was alone in the orchard?"

"No! She was with a cavalier."

"Ah! You knew him also?"

"Yes! I do not know his name! I saw him first at Magdeburg. He was a fierce fighter. He is a foreigner. I saw him yesterday as he rode away from the palace, and he lodges in the Fremdengasse. He is an officer."

"You seemed to have followed him! Did you suspect him of stealing your lamb?"

"Yes!" said Pastor Rad with an indignation which was not fictitious.

"And instead you found him with this strange Countess! Can you describe her to me?"

"She is very tall. She has dark hair, dark eyes, red lips, a pale complexion, and bears herself proudly!"

"Ah! Such a one can hardly escape notice in Vienna!" said the Jesuit. "And what is your purpose with this maiden—this Elspeth Reinheit?"

"To take her back to her father, and if she be indeed yet a true maid, to marry her!"

"She would scarcely have suffered loss in company of a great lady?"

"I do not know anything of great ladies! But I have many reasons to think this foreign officer may have wronged her—even in Magdeburg."

"'Judge not, that ye be not judged,' Pastor Rad. I promise that, if she be in Vienna, she shall be handed over to you. See to it that you deal tenderly with your lamb in return for our gentle dealing with you."

"I was robbed of my money!" Pastor Rad complained.

"It shall be repaid to you twice over," said the Jesuit. "How much was it?"

The pastor told him, and the Jesuit noted it on his tablets.

"Now get to your lodgings and wait there a day. A servant shall go with you."

On the same day Nigel Charteris was summoned by the Emperor's Military Council, and bidden make his way through Bavaria to join his old commander Count Tilly. There and not in Austria or Bohemia it was thought that a period might be put to the King of Sweden's progress. Tilly had men enough in conjunction with the Elector Maximilian's, but lacked officers. The Council feared the Saxons less, who were at Prague, and so in a manner at their doors, than the foreigner Gustavus, who had so signally shown his mastery alike upon the Elbe and upon the Rhine.

Asking what forces he was to conduct, he was told that a mere escort would be sufficient. The road was open, and speed alone was necessary. Nigel was more flattered than if three regiments had been confided to him, for the Council made it appear that it was he, Nigel, and not regiments, that was wanted. He knew that at the moment there was no superfluity of troops in and around Vienna to defend it should the Saxons decide to move southward, but his experience of the behaviour of the Saxon troops at Breitenfeld had left him with a poor opinion of their courage, their initiative, and their leadership.

Father Lamormain saw him after he had received his orders. He made no reference to Pastor Rad, of whose nearness Nigel was unaware, nor to the orchard close, nor to Stephanie. That some prowler or other had been about the trysting-place Nigel was aware, and, on account of the Archduchess, he had refrained from encountering him. Having seen nothing himself, he imagined that his own and his mistress's persons had enjoyed a like invisibility. Unaccustomed to fear himself, he had not understood why Stephanie in her concluding embrace had trembled and clung to him with the mingled weakness, tenderness, and passionate strength of which woman

is capable at supreme moments of danger. It had touched his heart. It had left him determined that nothing at the last should separate them but the hand of death itself. So he looked upon this expected summons to resume duty at the front with the confidence of youth, that nothing but a few short weeks lay between him and her he loved,—weeks perhaps in which he might compass more of that military glory he coveted, and so lessen the distance that yawned between them. What if he should find the opportunity to wrest from the pretendedly reluctant and chaffering Wallenstein the laurels of the Empire to lay at her feet?

So Nigel met Father Lamormain with no suspicion at the back of his mind, but rather with brave hopes and the supreme joy that a man feels who knows that he is beloved by her whom he conceives to be the star of womanhood.

Father Lamormain bade him exert himself to the utmost. He told him that the armies of Tilly and Maximilian constituted the final barrier that prevented the Swedish hosts, reinforced by Germans from every Protestant state, from rolling through Bavaria, resistless as the Danube in flood, and finally reaching Vienna. He made him feel, as the clumsy brief remarks and explanations of the Army Council had not, though they had borne some suggestion, that on his own personal devotion and intelligence depended the whole fortune of the Empire. The appeal was the more sure that it was in the first place an appeal to his simple loyalty as a mercenary soldier, and not to his nationality. In the second place, Father Lamormain appealed to his faith. He spoke in no uncertain way of the fate of those heretics who should fall, striving against the Emperor and Holy Church. He touched slightly on the indiffer-

ence of the Holy Father, Urban the Eighth, to the calls of the Emperor for succour, and the apparent hostility of the fervently Catholic King of France and his Cardinal Minister. He deplored them, but did not gloss them over. He was evidently, so Nigel thought, working towards producing in Nigel a proper state of mind from which might spring the spiritual flower of a heroic death. It was the rule of the order. For the individual, sacrifice; for the cause of the order, everything that might enhance its progress.

It was as if the Jesuit strove to wean him from earthly aims, to instil into him something of the essence of his own self-lessness: and, for the brief while that the audience lasted, Nigel's soul and mind took some impress in its wax of youth of the deep and hard graven die that was the Jesuit's.

More than before Nigel felt that an active benevolence in regard to him ran like a golden thread through the tissue of Father Lamormain's talk, that, while urging self-immolation on the altar of the Empire, he urged it only as a means of spiritual safety from pitfalls that otherwise yawned for him in this world and the next.

To the hidden meaning Nigel possessed no clue. The one all-obliterating fact of his love for the Archduchess and her love for him prevented the die of the Jesuit making more than a faint permanent impression upon his mind, sufficient only to be memorable.

Father Lamormain seemed to be aware of this faintness of impression, for he sighed deeply as Nigel, having received his last benediction, took his final leave.

Nigel rode forth towards Bavaria fully determined to fight the Swede, but whether the eyes of Stephanie, or the heavenly crown pictured for him by Father Lamor-

main, glittered the more brightly to his thoughts, is a question each one must settle for himself.

One thing Father Lamormain had kept back, and that was the progress of the negotiations between the Emperor and Wallenstein, which were still at a delicate stage, and were yet shaping towards success.

CHAPTER XXXV.

AN EMBASSY FOR STEPHANIE.

Two months slipped past for Gustavus Adolphus, two months of strenuous nights and days, two months of petty hostilities and multifarious negotiations. Richelieu was attempting to isolate Austria, bargaining with the Princes of the League that they should stand aside as neutrals, bargaining with Gustavus that, if they did, he should respect their neutrality. Then there could be nothing to prevent Gustavus from crushing Austria, and Richelieu's cup of joy would be full. Maximilian had indeed made a secret treaty with France, hoping to save his dominions from the Swede. But Richelieu's plan for isolation fell through, for Gustavus found reason to suspect the intentions of Maximilian, and marched into Franconia, whence Count Tilly had driven out Gustavus's General, Horn. When Gustavus marched, he had with him Horn, and Banner, and Duke William of Weimar, and forty thousand men.

Count Tilly was forced to retreat to the very confines of Bavaria, while Gustavus made a triumphant entry into Nuremberg, which received him with immense ovations.

Two months had also slipped past for Ferdinand and much had happened in Austria. It was summed up in this that Wallenstein had been gathering an army. He

had refused to consider the question of its command in the field. He had undertaken its muster, contented to show the Emperor once again how potent was the name of Wallenstein wherewith to conjure men from all the quarters of Germany and beyond.

But Ferdinand the Emperor and his Father Confessor, encouraged yet to hope, resting on the fact that an army was being mustered between Vienna and Prague, at Znaim, to which haven Wallenstein had returned, making it his headquarters, were nevertheless perturbed about the attitude of the Elector Maximilian. Father Lamormain knew that the French Cardinal was endeavouring to detach him from the Emperor, knew also that Maximilian had much to gain from neutrality, immunity for his country, which had hitherto been spared the devastations of the war, and eventual aggrandisement for himself if the sun of Austria sank to its setting. On the other hand, both the Jesuit and the Emperor remembered oft-repeated proofs of Maximilian's fidelity to the Catholic faith and to the Emperor.

"Your Majesty must send an ambassador!" said Father Lamormain. "Such an ambassador as by his own nobility and charm of person and of eloquence shall sway the mind of the Elector, nay, his very heart, so that it shall tend towards your Majesty and thereby abide. And that quickly!"

Ferdinand smiled that pallid half-sardonic smile of his which seemed to sum up the weariness of generations of Habsburgs, and to be in itself a satiric comment upon the futility of human endeavours to stem the progress of events. He put a question—

"Whom?"

"The Archduchess Stephanie!"

The Emperor frowned the merest suspicion of a frown. Father Lamormain watched him peacefully, as if it had

been an affair of shuttlecocks and not a deep political design.

"Alone? Since when has Austria depended upon its women?"

"To the first question your Majesty, No! To the second, Always!"

"Ah!" said the Emperor. "My son Ferdinand."

"The Archduke Ferdinand! And with him the Archduchess Stephanie."

"Is she likely to add such cogency to our arguments that Bavaria will steady itself to be our last buttress?"

"The Elector Maximilian has sought her in marriage. The project has been deferred by the war, but the living princess, with pleading in her tones and promises in her eyes, should outweigh all the bribes of Richelieu."

"If Stephanie chose, she could bewitch him that he could not but choose to adhere to our side. But it has seemed to me that she was indifferent to his suit."

"Princesses can have no choice of their spouses!" said Father Lamormain. "Your Majesty must be round with her, leave her no room for wavering, bid her to her duty."

"You have as much influence with her as I, Father. If I do my part, so must you."

"Your Majesty may count on my endeavour! It is a happy moment when the need of Austria must outbalance all personal whims."

"The roads are open? You can arrange for a sufficient and well-equipped retinue, for a small company of our goodliest dames and demoiselles?"

"We are still Austria, your Majesty!"

"The project is good, Father! Put it in hand at once. The more haste the better."

Ferdinand's face cleared perceptibly.

On further reflection Father Lamormain judged it the wiser plan to prepare the mind of the Archduchess for

the order of the Emperor. He knew perhaps better than any one, except Stephanie, how rebellious a Habsburger there was in her. It is even possible that the Archduchess considered her own doings as fulfilling all the *reasonable* demand of the parental laws. She would, however, have placed her own interpretation on the meaning of "*reasonable*."

He lost no time in seeking her out in her own apartments, and entreating a few moments' conversation.

He began by asking her whether by any chance a young woman, Elspeth Reinheit by name, had travelled with her from Prague, on her way home from Halberstadt.

The Archduchess, evidently astonished at the question, said—

"No! What makes you ask?"

"There is a certain Lutheran pastor, your Highness, who has journeyed to Vienna, one Melchior Rad, who seeks this Elspeth Reinheit."

"Yes! But what has that to do with me?"

"He is convinced that this girl was brought by a certain mysterious Countess Otilie von Thüringen, *of whom I have more than once heard*, to Prague, that she set out for Znaim, and from Znaim for Vienna."

"Indeed! I know of no Countess of the name!"

"Nor do I," said the Jesuit. "Though I have searched the records of heraldry," he added quietly.

The Archduchess felt that the Jesuit was playing the cat to her mouse.

He proceeded: "But the singular thing is that when asked to describe the Countess Otilie he described your Highness passably well."

"Whom he may have seen at Halberstadt!" said the Archduchess, determined that the cat should not gobble her.

"Only he has not been there!" said Father Lamormain.

"A prodigy!" said the Archduchess.

"More prodigious still, he recognised your voice, though he did not see your Highness by reason of the darkness!"

"Recognised my voice!" said the Archduchess, now roused to a fine appearance of indignation. "Where was this prowling Lutheran that he could hear my voice and neither see me nor be seen?"

"Upon the wall of the orchard close in the gardens of the palace of Vienna!"

But the Archduchess was quick of wit. "Dear Father Lamormain," she said without a blush, and with an amused irony in her tones, "since when is it reported that I have taken to assignations in the dark in orchard closes?"

"Nay!" said Father Lamormain. "Perchance I used not the right words. It was clumsy of me! The honest Pastor Rad but recognised the voice of his Countess talking to her lover in the orchard close!"

"And the lover?" the Archduchess asked with an accent of merriment. "Did his Lutheran sapience recognise him also?"

"He had followed him thither!" said the Jesuit. "It was no other than our faithful Scot, who has to-day departed for Tilly's army!"

"I believe none of your pastor's tales! There is no Elspeth Reinheit about the palace, even in the kitchens, no Ottilie von Thüringen that I have ever heard of in Vienna. As for me I have a suitor, or had one, of whom you have spoken aforetime, the Elector Maximilian. One suitor at a time is trouble enough."

The Jesuit knew too many particulars of the doings of Ottilie von Thüringen to be in any doubt as to her identity, but his suspicions of Nigel were too slight to credit the whole story of the pastor, so he said—

"It would be a great ease to the mind of the Emperor

could you but take the Elector's suit in grave earnest," and he sighed heavily. "For the Empire is in great jeopardy. The Swede advances towards us. We have nothing as yet to oppose him but Tilly's army, gathered from a hundred garrisons. The Holy Father refuses his aid. France, ever jealous of us, seeks to bribe Maximilian into neutrality. With Maximilian and the other princes of the League neutral, what chance does Austria stand?"

There was no mistaking the priest's seriousness. It impressed the Archduchess more than if he had preached a sermon on the end of all things. She had an uneasy conscience, for had she not helped to pull down the Empire?

"But what can I do?" she asked.

"You can give yourself for the Empire! In a time of peace you would have been wedded before this to whomsoever the Emperor judged it fit. In this time of war you can gain eternal salvation by offering yourself to our old ally."

"But how?"

"An embassy goes out to Bavaria to meet Maximilian to beg him to delay his scheme of neutrality, to oppose a strong front, to let his cities be besieged but not surrendered, to fight inch by inch of his soil, until we can bring a fresh army to his aid and drive back the Swede."

"And the embassy consists of?"

"The Archduke Ferdinand! Your Highness might well go with him, and some of our ladies. When Maximilian hears you plead for the Empire, hears you offer to stay with him and share his toils and his glory, there will be dealt the death-blow to the plots of France, and for Sweden it will be the beginning of the end."

"And what if the Elector flout me? It is ill offering the goods in the market that have once been denied to the buyer."

The Father Confessor smiled.

"We have never denied Maximilian. And the good wine has become the mellower in our Austrian cellars!"

The Archduchess drew up her head and pouted her red lips.

"We will consider this matter. The Empire shall not perish for need of us. Though, in faith, wanting Maximilian, the Empire still has Wallenstein!" She looked covertly at the priest as she mentioned the name.

"Your Highness has at times much prized our Wallenstein!"

"Yes, and with cause! By Wallenstein and not by Maximilian shall we be delivered. By all means let us use Maximilian as our buttress, but our sword and buckler in the open field will be Wallenstein. I would it were he and not Maximilian that I had to seek out!"

Father Lamormain marked the maidenly flush that accompanied the outspokenness, and adding them to what he had already known of her doings, he began to regard the tale of Pastor Rad as arising from some strange ferment in his brain. In any case his main point was gained. The Archduchess would go. How deep were her feelings towards the Elector, or towards Wallenstein, he could not gauge. But he knew the depth of the Habsburg pride, that, rebellious or not, must in the long-run fan the altar flame in the shrine of the Imperial house.

But Father Lamormain, reader of hearts and minds, of eyes and mouths and tones, was not omniscient, and he did not read the Archduchess Stephanie; for how should he know that in one short hour she had thrown down the image of Wallenstein and set up that of the Scottish soldier of fortune. Had he reflected that the western road might lead to the Scot as easily as to the Elector? The cat was allowing the mouse too much law.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A RECONNAISSANCE.

GUSTAVUS, in view of the proposals for the neutrality of the Elector, had granted a fortnight's cessation from hostilities. The Elector made use of it to strengthen his positions, and an intercepted letter showed Gustavus that, whatever Richelieu might think, the Elector had no intention of being neutral. Gustavus, once undeceived, marched with all the army he could muster against Tilly, and drove him out of Franconia. Tilly, advised by Maximilian, came to a stand on the banks of the Lech, which forms one of the frontiers of Bavaria. The firm intention of Tilly was to hold back Gustavus from the virgin territories of Maximilian.

The army of Count Tilly was drawn up in a position chosen by himself, astride the main road from Donauwerth to Neuburg, Ingolstadt, and Ratisbon, a position naturally defended on three sides by water, strongly fortified and armed. No bridges lent the Swedish army access. They had been destroyed. Along Tilly's front in an almost straight line was the river Lech in a state of turbulence and flood.

Gustavus stigmatised it as a brook, but even brooks have played a great part in the history of battles; and, sanguine leader that he was, it is doubtful if he ex-

pected to cross it by a wild rush through its treacherous waters.

Disposed in earthworks at suitable intervals behind the river were numerous pieces of ordnance ready to dispute the passage of the Swedes. And into the rear of the defences Maximilian himself had led up those regiments that constituted the household troops of his command, as opposed to those that formed part of the Imperial army under Count Tilly.

The conjoined host was a formidable one, well armed, provisioned, rested, numbering not much less than the forty thousand of the Swede.

A week before Nigel had ridden into Tilly's camp, much to the old general's surprise.

"I had thought Wallenstein would have clapped hands upon you to command a brigade!"

"I am not rich enough!" said Nigel. "Besides, who knows whether he will be needed."

"H'm!" was the old general's comment. "If old Tilly gets knocked on the head he will be needed, and soon. But what am I to do with you? Had you brought me three or four regiments now! Said there was a lack of officers, did they? Fools! Of captains and lieutenants? Yes! They have a habit of getting killed! Of colonels even I lack one or two, but of generals! I warrant Gustavus has not half as many. 'Tis the way of Imperial armies!"

"'Tis no matter what I am called!" said Nigel. "Give me a regiment. I am content to be called 'Colonel.' Give me a chance of having at them, sword, musket, gun, anyhow."

"You shall stand just as good a chance of getting killed as I do," grunted the Count.

Nigel was satisfied. The old general's thirst for danger was well known, and he had not forgotten Breitenfeld.

Presently Count Tilly assigned him his command. It was a small brigade, comprising three regiments of musketeers and two batteries of ten pieces each. One of the regiments had just lost its colonel, the colonels of the other two were but young in experience, and had but recently been promoted.

The artillery was commanded by a major, who, Tilly said, might be relied upon to handle his pieces and his men in a soldier-like fashion, but had no head for tactics. This Nigel was to supply. Nigel's lines were well up the Lech towards the little town of Rain, and the northern angle of the triangle that formed the whole position of the camp.

For some days at least Nigel did nothing but drill and exercise his little force, make himself acquainted with his officers, and make reconnaissances along the road by which Gustavus must come.

The next best thing to a solitary hill-top for descrying an advancing host is a church spire, and one such, in a village some ten Scots miles from Rain, and a mile or two off the road to Donauwerth, Nigel had marked for a look-out tower.

Before the late sunrise of a wintry morning, wrapped in his ample horseman's cloak, he had crossed the Lech by the only and that a pontoon bridge and galloped for the village.

There was but a faint glimmer of dawn visible over the flat country as he approached the place, and little more as he slid from his horse, tethered it in a farmer's half-filled barn, and strode forward to the village church.

Cautiously he stole in at the door and up the winding stone stair to the belfry tower, and then up a rickety ladder into the spire itself as far as he could get. There was an open trap-door at the top, and inside was darkness.

He pulled himself up, and, feeling with his hands that a gangway of planks was laid against the outer framework of the spire, he crawled along it, hoping to find a convenient chink, or a small window hatch, to serve his purpose. The cold damp wind of the morning rather than the light apprised him that such a peep-hole was near him, and he felt about and about for the fastenings.

It was just when his hands had in fact touched the rusty hasp that the feeling came over him that he was not alone. The place was dark but not noiseless, for the wind whistled eerily and partially lifted loose laths of wood by one end, only to let them fall again as if in mockery of the work of men's hands. But over and above these noises was something more. It was as if other hands at some other point of the circumference were seeking slowly and noiselessly to undo a stubborn latch or rusty bolt. This muffled noise had made itself heard once or twice, and Nigel crouched warily on guard. Then, framed in a pause, came a clink of metal, of a sword against a spur, then silence.

Through a hundred little chinks the dawn began to steal and make of the darkness merely a misty gloom. Nigel had risen to his feet, and there across the unfloored space loomed the figure of another man, in cloak and headpiece like himself, standing stark against the roof.

With a grim quick motion Nigel ripped open his hatch, and with an answering jerk the stranger opened his. The wind rushed across with a roar and a whistle, and the dawn poured in till it made a twilight.

"Eh! sir! It's braw and snell the morn!" said the stranger, making a polite salute with his sword.

"Aye is it!" said Nigel, surprised beyond measure by the sound of the Scots tongue, but returning the compliment in kind.

"Mebbe ye wouldna refuse a wee tassie o' usquebaugh!" the stranger went on affably.

"When I know, sir, whether you come here as friend or enemy," said Nigel, looking across at the weather-tanned but open face something suspiciously.

"Man! ye should never refuse a cup offered in kindness, be it by friend or enemy. But to lat ye ken, I'm just ane o' yon Gustavus' officers, and I came here to spy out Count Tilly's dispositions. Give me twa glimpses and a keek oot o' this spy-hole and I'm your very humble servant." And without more ado he bowed, turned round, and scanned the camp at Rain, which he could see quite well through a glass.

And under his breath he counted and added—

"Thirty thousand, or mebbe thirty-twa! And a wheen o' cannon! And a river in front and the highroad behind. It's ower safe! I wouldna give a fig to be in yon." There was a note of good-natured contempt in his voice. "Eh! sir!"

"And why, sir?" asked Nigel, amused by the coolness of this gentleman, for gentleman he seemed for all his plainness of speech, which, it struck Nigel, might have been assumed.

"I have no liking to fight through the bars of a hen-coop with the back out. Give me a gentle hillside and a wide plain, where there's no rinnin' awa' till all's daen, where there's room to get each at other. I dinna favour your fortified camps!"

"As for me," said Nigel, "I have had experience of both kinds of fighting, but on this occasion it is for me to await you on the other side of the river. I am with Count Tilly!"

"I gave you credit, sir, for more sense, seeing you'd a Scots tongue in your heid!" was the commentary.

"But it's richt ye should tak' your fill o' what ye can see! I'm for doon the stair," he added.

Nigel made a movement to intercept him. He waved his glove in friendly deprecation.

"Hoots aye! I'll wait for you at the foot! Ye'll be perverse enough to be wishing to carry me back to breakfast in Tilly's camp. And I've made up my mind to tak' ye back with me to sup our brose! I'll wait! Never fear!"

With which he went quietly and unhurried down the stair—and Nigel took a long look from his hatch. Very dimly he descried something in movement along the road from Donauwerth, and on the wings of the morning air came the sound of a solitary trumpet. Gustavus was advancing, and it behoved Nigel to get back to the camp. He descended the stair, and found the enemy standing, stamping his feet in the roadway.

"Now, sir! where's your horse? Mine's here. I've no wish to carry you, or you me, and there's no need to hack the puir beasties, so if it's all the same to you we'll fight on foot!"

"It's all the same to me," said Nigel, throwing off his cloak. "My horse is in the barn yonder."

"Good!" said the other. "Swords is it? And the first man to be disabled is the other's prisoner! Are these the conditions of the combat?"

Nigel saluted. "My name and condition is,—Nigel Charteris of Pencaitland—Major-General—commanding a brigade under Count Tilly."

"And mine is Sir John Hepburn, Captain-General of the Scots Brigade, serving with Gustavus Adolphus. It is a rare pity we should meet so. I kent your father lang syne. Even now I am willing to go my ways and allow you to do the same."

A swirl of remembrance gushed into Nigel's brain at the words, "Sir John Hepburn!"

"It is just that you are Sir John Hepburn that I dare not!" said Nigel. "Were you a lesser man!"

Sir John Hepburn stood on guard, a man of forty, broad-shouldered, well-knit, wary.

"Have at you, Sir John!" said Nigel, and the battle began.

They were both good swordsmen, but the fact that each had made up his mind to disarm the other without doing him much bodily hurt, engendered such an excess of caution as made it an affair of more length than bloodshed. Both men were winded before either had scored a scratch.

By mutual consent they dropped their points and took breath, but spoke never a word. Both had wrists of the hardest sinew, and both had learned most of the tricks of fence that Spain, Italy, and France could teach.

It was curious how each divined a change in the attack, and attuned his defence to meet it.

The one fact that emerged from the continual parry and thrust was that Nigel was the better able to recover his wind, and slightly the more agile, and so, given an equal fortune, would wear his opponent down.

"Faith! Nigel Charteris! ye're a wise chiel at the swords!" blurted Sir John at the end of the fourth bout.

Once more they crossed, and the sparks flew from their weapons, and this time indeed neither man came off scathless, though the wounds were too slight to hinder either, and then came Nigel's opportunity: for in making a new attack Sir John did not recover himself quickly enough to prevent fleet-footed Nigel slipping beneath his guard, and by a turn of the wrist making it necessary for Sir John to have his own broken, or to let go his sword. Nigel had him at his mercy.

"Do you yield yourself a prisoner, Sir John?"

"Aye! do I! But for no long time!" He picked up

his sword, and wiped it with a lace handkerchief and thrust it into its scabbard.

Nigel looked round. Coming at a sharp trot was a small troop of horsemen from the direction of Donauwerth.

"I doubt ye'd best cry quits and tak' your horse. They won't follow you if you're by yourself, but if you're hampered with a prisoner, I canna vouch for them." There was a kindly gleam in his eyes as he said it.

Nigel took the hint, and holding out his hand said, "Farewell, Sir John! And thanks for your courtesy."

"Farewell, Mr Charteris, and if at any time you should see fit to change camps, or need a friend in other ways, call upon Jock Hepburn!"

And while Nigel sought his horse, the other turned to his, and meeting the horsemen rode off with them.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE DEFENCE OF THE LECH.

TWO Bavarians had been recommended to him as aides-de-camp, men of good breeding and great courtesy. They had arrived with the Elector Maximilian, but had asked Tilly as a favour to be attached to an officer of experience with the view of learning all they could. In some way Nigel's name came up, and to Nigel they were attached. Nigel found their society and their comradeship very agreeable, and kept them constantly employed. At the table their talk ran much on the notable warriors of old and modern times, and personal daring and valour they extolled as the most godlike virtues: from which Nigel deduced that they had seen little of actual service, for men who have been through the grim experience of a hardly-fought campaign, not to say two or three, know how little these avail at one time, how greatly at another, according to the twists and turns of fortune or the success of strategy: know how they are displayed by the commonest soldier or by the greatest general without bragging, or any claim to be considered unusual. But the two aides were not much older than himself, and very devout men, and there was no harm in their talk if it was rather too much in one tune.

Gustavus' army made a formidable show as it took up a position on the high ground on the opposite bank of the Lech. Nigel noted that his artillery was lighter and more numerous than Tilly's, and his batteries were placed more closely together on ground that was somewhat higher than Tilly's, and therefore should have more effect gun for gun, and showed an intention of making a great attack on one spot.

Nigel knew that their own position was a strong one, and with the river swollen as it was by melting snows, that it was practically impossible for Gustavus to push home his attack, however heavy the fire of his artillery, without a bridge.

On the morrow when day broke the artillery on both sides began their clamour, and, although a few shots fell into the midst of the most forwardly placed regiments, the battle for hours was between artillery. The position chosen for his artillery by Gustavus showed at once the eye of the strategist, for the fire swept across the northern angle of the triangle, and in that area the fire was constant and appalling in its severity. If Tilly had chosen the post of posts for Nigel that offered the greatest number of chances of death, that was it. Nigel even thought that Father Lamormain's exhortations to get slain, if possible, were in a fair way to fulfilment. And to his surprise his two aides-de-camp, unaccustomed as they were, showed a noble rivalry in devotion. They dared the most hazardous risks, while they carried his orders to the different contingents, with an air of doing nothing notable which charmed Nigel, though it made him shake his head. For his own part he urged upon his artillery commander the greatest economy in his fire, to direct it with the greatest care upon one selected spot till he had put the enemy's guns to silence, and to reserve himself and his men as much as possible for the

attempt to cross that would surely be made later in the day.

Then on the Swedish bank of the river a great smoke arose from fires of damp wood and straw. The wind blew it into Tilly's camp, where it mingled with the smoke of the artillery. It soon became difficult to see what was forward.

"The bridge!" said Nigel. "He is building a bridge!"

For long it was impossible to be sure where it was being begun. The noise of hammering was lost in the noise of the firing. The smoke belched forth for hundreds of yards along the river bank. The fire of Gustavus' ordnance continued, relentlessly pounding away upon all the batteries of Tilly within range, and being light, their position was changed from one half-hour to another as the Swedish officers thought fit.

"A bold swimmer might spy it out!" was the suggestion of one aide-de-camp.

Nigel had thought of it; but for a man to go into that icy and turbulent water was to meet certain death, even were he roped. He would be numbed before he could see anything, or shot by some of the Swedes, who doubtless lay securely along their higher bank.

A boat, a raft, anything that floated on the surface would be a mark. No! There was but one way, to wait till the bridge workers had advanced to mid-river and then shatter their handiwork. But with what engine? Nigel had discovered that the guns of the Swedes from their slightly higher elevation commanded all the available pieces of Count Tilly, raking the Imperial entrenchments with a desolating precision.

Yet a reply had to be made. Every officer that could be spared was busy encouraging the gunners to face the enemy and load their pieces, sponge, ladle in the powder, ram home the fresh charges, with the certainty that here

and there along the line a great ball would come, smashing backs and limbs, or terrifying the manhood out of their veins.

Again and yet again Nigel himself would snatch the rammer from a trembling wretch and ram home the charge: would point the gun, wedging it up to get the greater height needed. It was desperate work. And his two aides worked like him, shirking nothing.

A little change in the breeze and he saw where the Swedish engineers, working like men possessed, pushed out the bridge a few planks at a time, fastening them to pontoons which others rolled down to them. Now he knew his direction, and five of his guns were trained directly on to the growing bridge. But scarcely had they dropped their first hustling load of round-shot than a furious cannonade of the Swedes put the whole five out action. No gunners' bravery availed, or could avail. It was tempting useless slaughter.

Then Nigel led down files of musketeers from the entrenchment and disposed them along the banks to scare away the workers, but the enemy did likewise, and so harassed the musketeers that few of their shots reached a mark at all.

All along the banks on either side the battle raged in some sort. Mainly it was an affair of cannon-balls, but wherever musketry could be expected to make an impression Tilly ordered his men forward, exposing himself to the continual cannon fire. But everywhere the Swedes made the greater havoc, though the position, if resolutely defended, was still impregnable, and the Imperialists became more and more depressed.

The bridge crept out another yard. It could be seen how Gustavus was bringing up a fresh picked body of his veterans, Swedes all of them, calm, resolute, bearded men, bronzed and scarred with many a fight, ready for the rush

across that would herald the hand-to-hand fighting that would follow.

Nigel hated the suspense. He longed for the moment when he could lead down his musketeers and pikemen to the crash of the charge. And yet was it wise to wait? Could nothing be done?

A raft with twenty men upon it? Dare he? He named it to his aides. Dare? They would dare. They need not risk his life, more valuable than theirs. Here was greater fighting to be done. There was no taunting. But how skilfully they plied him too!

Up the river four hundred yards to give it greater impact they got some of the Bavarian woodmen to lash logs together and cross them with other logs, and three men from the banks of the Danube to guide the raft as well as they could and fend it off the banks with long poles. A small keg of powder and a hatchet apiece made the cargo for this short voyage. Except the polemen, the rest crouched low, holding by the ropes.

Nigel was there. He did not ask himself why he was there, risking his life, but what he would be able to do.

The river boiled and swirled. The logs creaked. The whole raft would have turned if it could, if it had not been for the frantic straining of the polemen.

The setting out of the voyagers was unnoticed amid so much din and turmoil, but they had scarcely fared half the way in less than a minute of time than musket-shot came scrambling among them. Two hundred yards more, a mere leap it looked along the water. They held their breath and braced their limbs for the shock. There was the half-built bridge. A crash! What a rending, and churning of the waters! They were upon it, the raft driven half upon it; of the raft's crew half of them were hurled into the river, the other half upon the bridge. Five of the bridge builders went down before them, two

of them to Nigel's sword. Then the keg of powder was staved in and set endwise under the planking and a match made ready. But the bridge builders were reinforced by twenty stout pikemen, who pushed on to the bridge head and thrust at Nigel's men with fury.

It was an unequal contest, for while five men engaged the enemy, the other five or six endeavoured to free the raft from the timbers of the bridge, and Nigel waited in the deadliest peril, firing the match.

The raft was wellnigh free, the water began to take hold of it again, twisting it determinedly, when the Swedes, checked for the moment by the stubbornness of the Imperialists, bore down their opponents. But Nigel had got the tarred rope well alight. "Now for your lives!" he said, and regardless of pike-thrust and musket-shot they flung themselves on to the raft and swept on, while the powder sullenly exploded, breaking loose a full half of the work completed, and blowing seven or eight stout pikemen into the waves.

For Nigel there was the rushing water, a volley of musketry, a sharp pain followed by a momentary sensation of falling into the stream, then nothing.

But night was drawing in, and Gustavus could not cross.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A SURPRISE AT RATISBON.

NIGEL awoke to the jolting of an ox-waggon, over which was a rough covering. He was lying in his cloak on a truss of straw. Beside him sat one of his aides-de-camp, Captain von Grätz. But just now he looked strangely unlike a military man, and was reciting prayers, fingering a rosary which hung about his neck while he did so, with an earnestness that suggested that some one was on the point of death.

For a moment or two or three Nigel could not bring his mind to any clear understanding. The officer had a lantern. Outside, through the opening in the rough hood, was a blue sky and frosty-looking stars. Tramp! Tramp! The army was on the march. Whither and why? Heaven, what a pain! In his side, or was it in his shoulder? Nigel felt stiff for the most part, but the pain was sharp and not always in one place.

The aide-de-camp raised the lantern and looked at him, gave him a draught of some kind, which sent the blood circulating more warmly, and made his stiff limbs feel as if they were being teased by a thousand pricks. Then he said "Hush!" and went on praying till Nigel fell asleep.

In the morning they had reached Neuburg, and Nigel

was sufficiently himself to understand what had happened. Count Tilly had had his right leg shattered by a cannon-ball, and a man of seventy-three, tough even as Tilly, does not suffer such wounds with impunity. Altringer, his next in command, was dead. The Elector Maximilian, swayed by Tilly, had ordered a retreat from that wellnigh impregnable position. With nightfall the retreat had begun, to Neuburg first. Then it was to be Ingolstadt, where another stand would be made. Count Tilly was still alive. The next question Nigel put was for the other aide-de-camp. He had been drowned in the Lech. He had "died for the faith," as his comrade-in-arms said.

"You are a regular priest?"

The aide-de-camp inclined his head in token of assent.

"We obey orders!" he said softly.

"What is the matter with me?"

"You had a pike-thrust through your left shoulder, a musket-shot grazed your ribs, you were knocked unconscious from a blow from the raft as you fell into the water. The poleman just snatched you from the gates of heaven!" The Jesuit sighed as he said the last words. "As for myself, it is not time yet."

Nigel had no reply ready. He decided however that, as he did not feel any resentment against the poleman, he was not yet prepared for the end his companion, evidently in good faith, desired for him.

A night and a day at Neuburg and the army with its men and its waggons, its artillery, its swarms of camp-followers, passed on to Ingolstadt.

Count Tilly still lived, and while he lived Maximilian acted upon his advice.

"Defend Ingolstadt as long as possible. Throw troops forward into Ratisbon and hold that. Holding the two you hold the Danube!"

Other advice he gave, that all wounded and camp-followers should be sent forward to Ratisbon. Ingolstadt was strongly fortified and might turn the edge of Gustavus' sword if it contained nothing but fighting men. Ratisbon would be a safe refuge for a few weeks.

Nigel was carried into the presence of Count Tilly at Ingolstadt.

The old general, looking shrivelled, sunken, his eyes feverishly bright, lay in his bed. His hat with the red feather and his sword hung upon the wall.

He looked up and recognised Nigel.

"You too, boy?"

"Not badly!" said Nigel.

"Go on to Ratisbon! You'll be well enough to fight the Swede again in three weeks!" His voice faltered even in its weakness. He turned his head away a minute or two. Nigel knew what the old warrior was thinking, and could not find it in him to utter the worthless consolatory hopes that he might.

"But *I* shall never fight again! The Swede has beaten me. I would that we had fought in the open and not cooped up behind trenches and rivers. Well! It is Wallenstein's chance now, and for *me* nothing but the priest's viaticum. God be with you, boy!"

Nigel clasped his thin sword-hand with his own, and the young soldier of fortune looked into the eyes, the stern, sharp, wistful, wild eyes of the old soldier, who was doomed beyond possible help of army surgeon, and the old man knew that the young one held him for a brave man, who had been staunch to his profession, and loyal to the Emperor even to the death. There was more comfort in Nigel's eyes than in a thousand protestations from men who had never faced ball and pike-thrust on a hard-fought field.

Nigel gulped down something and whispered hoarsely—

“Good-bye, General. The Holy Saints help you!”

His orderlies carried him out, and two days afterwards Tilly died, the sound of Gustavus’ cannon, without the walls of Ingolstadt, ringing in his ears.

Nigel reached Ratisbon in the train of the troops sent on to defend it. Every day he was under the ministrations of the Jesuit, who combined the art of the healer with that of spiritual director, as if he had never, sword in hand, hewn down Swedish pikemen on the bridge at the Lech. Every day made him gain something of ease. And once lodged in a comfortable upper room at Ratisbon he began to recover the usage of his legs.

But he was still far from the recovery of his full vigour, and spent most of the day looking from a window seat, his shoulders leaning against cushions because of his wounds, upon the passing trivialities of the street, while the aide-de-camp was out about his military duties.

It was while he was thus employed that his soldier servant announced, “A high-born lady visiting the sick, colonel!”

Wondering what new adventure this might be, he bade the soldier bring her up.

First came a sour-visaged dame, whom Nigel half recognised and then decided that he did not. Hard on her heels came one that brought a sudden flush into his pallor. It was the Archduchess Stephanie.

It was clearly as unexpected on her part. But with wonderful presence of mind she entreated him not to rise, and bade her maid set down her basket and wait below.

Then as the door closed she sprang to him.

“Nigel! My love, Nigel! In Ratisbon!”

She knelt at his side, and placing his arm about her neck laid her face against his, and crooned softly to him as she would have done to a babe.

And he could say little but press her dear hand closer to him and whisper "Stephanie! You too in Ratisbon!"

"We came, my brother Ferdinand and I, to strengthen the hands of the Elector Maximilian, so that he fell not into the sin of neutrality."

"You and Ferdinand?" There was a world of inquiry in his tone.

"Yes, Nigel! Ferdinand was to play the fisherman and I the bait." She sprang from him and dropped a stately curtsey, pulling her face straight, serene and wonderful to behold for any one, but to Nigel not the Queen of Sheba nor Zenobia of Palmyra would have seemed more wonderful.

"And I the bait!" she repeated and laughed.

"But Maximilian had hopelessly broken his neutrality by the time you arrived!" said Nigel.

"We could not know it till we came! And then I told the Elector what I had told him in any hazard, I would not wed him were he twenty times Elector and the Great Mogul besides. It is not in my blood or my humour."

Nigel's eyes spoke the admiration for her boldness that he felt.

"Then you have tricked the Emperor, and Father Lamormain, and flouted Maximilian——"

"To follow you, Tall Captain, or carry you off in my arms, or what shall I do? I had no certain knowledge you were here. I had learned that the camp had been broken up, that Tilly had retired to Ingolstadt, and when I heard that the wounded were sent on to Ratisbon I began my search, wondering how much of you I might find."

"It is naught!" said Nigel, getting up. "I have lost blood. I have a scratch in the ribs, a thrust of pike in my left shoulder, but they heal. A Jesuit is living with

me, Captain von Grätz, salving me, preaching to me, and doing military duty too."

"Not a word to him! Father Lamormain suspects! I know not how much, but much!"

"You must plan, and I must plan!" said Nigel. "We are in a serious case. If we be not wedded in a little, wedded we two shall never be. It is too much to set the Emperor and the Elector at defiance and not expect reprisals. But if we be wedded, beloved Stephanie, we may even get off with a hair shirt and smock, saving your Highness, and exile to some remote castle in the Grisons."

Nigel was no screech-owl, nor in the way of seeing ill before it came except to prevent it, so his tone was gay; but there was doubt beneath.

"How did the Elector take it?" he went on.

"Faith, Nigel mine, but like as a pinch of sunshine peeps out between the gathering clouds and is now quite shut out, so he seemed to smile, but his brows were threatening black and his teeth gleamed a little.

"There is a touch of fantasy about the Wittelsbachers. Born in a lowlier station, Maximilian might have become a sad kind of troubadour, or a prophesying friar. Being a prince, he is capable of carrying out any wild imagining he might have to snatch me to him, or to wreak his disappointment."

"And we are in his hands here!" said Nigel.

"To-morrow, think you, Tall Captain, if I took the air on horseback without the walls, the Swede not yet being come up, that you could mount a charger and meet me by chance three leagues distance. If there were no guards out we might perchance slip further still and make our way——"

"To what port of shelter?"

"To Znaim! Sure Wallenstein would make you one of

his new captains, and Znaim would be a veritable city of refuge!"

Nigel drew in his breath. "Stephanie, you have a godlike courage! To Wallenstein! And yet why not? He will want officers. Here I am on the list of the sick. There shall I be serving the Emperor! It is a bold plan, Stephanie, but we must venture all, or be forever cravens!"

"To-morrow! Nigel! Heaven send not the Swedes too soon to close the gates. At midday three leagues away by the road from the eastern gate!"

"And to-morrow if it see not our wedding shall see the eve of the bridal!" She took Nigel by both hands, dealing as tenderly as with any babe, and looked upon him with such a look of mystery and love and motherhood in her eyes as caught him up into heaven and left him entranced while one might count a hundred. Her look smote through his eyes and on to his very soul, and put her impress there as it had been the seal of the greatest Empire of all the world.

Then they kissed in solemn troth-plight, and the Archduchess went down the stair leaving the room a darkness, though it was still broad day.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE CLOUDS AND SERGEANT BLICK.

NOT for the first time in his military life did Nigel feel lonely. In this town of Ratisbon he had many military comrades, but no friend who would be as a wall against which he could set his back when it came to the grim push of steel against a half-ring of foemen. In bonnie Scotland, had he sought to carry off a king's daughter, he could have raised a sturdy dare-all troop of kinsfolk, men of his blood and name, who would have broken down the West Port, scaled the crags of Edinburgh Castle, risking their necks and their lands in a desperate endeavour to win the guerdon for him of his heart's desire. And desperate though it might be, with the king's daughter willing, what Scottish noble would not have made the essay with a light heart? And here in Ratisbon was no one on whom he might rely for a stout arm and a reckless generosity of service.

A friend such as he needed, not to speak of ten friends, must be told everything. One cannot ask a friend to aid one in carrying off a king's daughter without telling him what the dangers are. Rapidly he told off the officers he knew in Ratisbon. All were in the pay of the Emperor or the Elector. At the mention of either the shoulders would go up, there would be long draughts of beer, a cloud

of smoke, pursed-up brows, and "Not to be thought of, my friend!" They were trusty fellows for the most part, would not betray his confidence, but neither would they throw themselves whole-heartedly into an enterprise which, successful, would bring to some certain death, and to the rest a very intangible reward, and failing would involve all in equal ruin.

Then again there were the Jesuits. Which of his trusty friends might not be Jesuits, if not, like his remaining aide-de-camp, a regular priest in an officer's uniform, then an officer, drawing Jesuit pay as well as the Emperor's?

He thought of the Emperor with his proud, cold, supercilious face. There was as little reason for hope of forgiveness as there was hope of consent from him. From the Emperor he passed to Maximilian, the prince who should have been a Jesuit, as he was the foster-child of Jesuitism. Of a lineage as proud as that of the Habsburgs, of a renown for policy as for valour, ruler of some of the fairest provinces and greatest cities of the Empire, he would of a surety in his love be as relentless an adversary as fate. Men of his dark complexion take the malady of love not lightly. Least of all men, being who he was, would he be pitiful. Brook a rival, once disclosed to him, in a Scots mercenary, were he Wallace Wight himself? As well might the Danube cease to flow eastward, ever eastward. And behind, but peering between these two haughty and melancholy faces in Nigel's thought, was Father Lamormain's gentle, suave, and smiling countenance, from whose mouth had flowed persuasive speech that clothed the stern resolved marching orders of that sinister brotherhood in whom there was no shadow of turning. Into no conceivable scheme of Father Lamormain's could fit any idea of the marriage of Nigel with the Archduchess. He had shown himself favourable to

the Elector's suit. Nigel's service to the Emperor would not count for aught if he should stand in the way of the Jesuit advance.

Nigel looked out upon the clouds of peril. He might win through with the Archduchess, make her his wife, reach Wallenstein. So much was possible, keeping their own counsel, acting swiftly with one mind, one courage. As for Wallenstein, it was impossible to predict how he might receive them, as friends, as hostages, or with cold negatives that should say "it lies not with my interest."

Nigel Charteris gazed upon the clouds of peril, and gazed undaunted. He was in that uplifted mood into which a mighty love exalts the soul, so that from its peak of splendour it can look down upon the clouds below hurtling their lightnings and sending up dim reverberations of their embattled thunders. For one hour of ecstasy shared by Stephanie he would cheerfully meet the after-doom.

He heard a footstep on the stair, a heavy tread, and the clank of spurs. His reverie was dissipated like a bubble. What new thing was to happen?

"Blick!"

"Me! Colonel!"

It was Blick, big-shouldered, red-faced, bull-necked, smacking somewhat of beer and other liquors, soldierly Sergeant Blick.

"How in the name of——?" Nigel began.

"Sent out foraging from Ingolstadt, general! Got through the Swedish lines at night, waggons and all, but couldn't get back again. Met an infernal ambush of Swedes in a forest road. My men stood stoutly by me, and we gave a round dozen of them their 'fall out,' but what with their muskets and the trees it was no go. So we set spurs to our horses and made straight for Ratisbon. The devil was in it, for they got our waggons, a load of

hams and a few barrels of good Bavarian beer, a score of lean fowls——”

“Enough, Blick! I warrant you left nothing of meat and drink but what you could not carry off! So you came to Ratisbon, and found me out?”

“Yes, colonel! Ingolstadt will come tumbling down in a day or two at most, and then the Swedes will come here after the Elector, as some say, or be off to ransack Munich, where he keeps his treasures, as others say. And in faith I don’t see what’s to stay him, now poor old Tilly’s dead!”

“Dead?”

“Aye! Died as Gustavus fired the first round of his cannon. He was a tough fighter, and his soldiers ever got leave to sack a town in their own way. No fine manners and milk and water about the old General with the Red Feather. Rest his soul!”

“Amen!” said Nigel devoutly, making the sign of the cross. “Now what are you going to do?”

“I’ve reported myself and men to the general in command of Ratisbon. He says, ‘Wait till the army retreats from Ingolstadt and then join it.’ Meantime I’m just looking after the horses and taking a ride to keep them in condition and get fodder for them, and there’s mighty little in Ratisbon!”

Nigel smiled. He knew that Blick considered it a lamentable thing when he and his troop, not to mention the horses, did not get full rations, and that, if the regulations did not bring him and his to eat, he helped himself to the best with a very fair ability.

“If the Swedes are not upon us to-morrow, Blick, I want you to do me a service.”

“How many troopers?”

“Two besides yourself, men you can trust, men who are good swordsmen, and see that your three horses are good

for a long journey if need be. And above all a quiet tongue, Blick, for you are meddling in a strange business. If any trouble come of it to you, you may blame me, as you obeyed orders. Meet me at the Eastern Gate with my horse at eleven. You will find him at the stables of the 'Cloister Bell.'"

"Yes, colonel! Two men, your own horse. Swords and pistols, at eleven, Eastern Gate!"

Blick saluted cheerfully. He wondered what was in the wind, but it was in any case a pastime, and Nigel, though not a spendthrift, always paid well for his services.

When the aide-de-camp returned that evening Nigel said nothing of his visitors, merely that he felt almost well enough to adventure the saddle on the morrow, and should try a short ride. The Jesuit examined his wounds carefully, and said he thought a gentle ride would do him no harm. Nothing more was said upon that score, though they talked freely about the progress of the Swede at Ingolstadt.

"It is a hard fortress to take," said the Jesuit, "and it may well be that the Swede may waste much powder and many good men before its walls and then not take it. Every week he spends before it is a week gained for us!"

"How?" asked Nigel. "We are shut up here!"

"Wallenstein's army grows daily, I hear. It is wonderful the magic of his name. From all places men are hastening."

Nigel expressed great wonder. He was surprised that, at a time when the Emperor was at his wits' end for men, Wallenstein could find them from the ends of the earth. But he also wished the Jesuit to tell him more.

But the Jesuit said nothing of how he had heard the news. Only the shadow of a fear ran across Nigel's heart

that news went fro, as well as to, over great distances, through this wonderful chain of the brotherhood that served Father Lamormain. And he wondered whether this kindly, helpful aide-de-camp, who had practically set him on his legs again, would not with an equal kindliness conduct him to the strongest dungeon in the citadel if he received orders. He knew it would be so.

The next morning saw Nigel at the hour named at the east gate, saw his eager charger nuzzling in his shoulder for joy, saw him gather his reins and mount, and, followed by the escort, set out briskly, as a man should, to his trysting-place.

CHAPTER XL.

RIDE, RIDE TOGETHER.

To cover three leagues in an hour on such a horse as Nigel bestrode was no great affair.

It may have been a little more or a little less when Sergeant Blick, with his watchful eyes, descried that his former colonel was rapidly overtaking a little party who rode in the same direction. It consisted apparently of a lady habited in a riding-dress suitable for the winter, surmounted by a military-looking cloak, and a groom on another horse just behind.

As Sergeant Blick was a long way off when he saw so much, he did not even attempt to guess who she might be. There were many highly-born ladies in Ratisbon just at that time, though Blick did not know why.

He was not long before he noticed that Nigel rode up on the lady's right and saluted her, and that her movements were such as to suggest to an observer that the meeting was a chance rencontre and a surprise.

The groom, who, like themselves, carried pistols in his holsters, fell back and gradually took up a position not far in front of Sergeant Blick, but kept his horse trotting at a certain distance as if aware of the soldiers, and not willing to mingle with them.

But the colonel did not seem to have any intention of

leaving the lady to conclude her promenade alone. The two, in fact, rode quickly side by side, as if bent on reaching some still distant goal in company. And it was some time before it dawned upon Blick's mind that this had been a rendezvous, and that his former colonel had entered upon the first phase of the enterprise to which he had referred the night before.

Had Blick been a Frenchman instead of a German he would have sniffed out an affair of the heart as soon as he caught a glimpse of a petticoat, but Blick was a German soldier, who had begun to get grizzled, and was already weather-beaten and scarred, and cared a vast deal more for a good dinner and a jovial emptying of beer-mugs than for toying with wenches, and on the occasions when Cupid had asserted his rights of dominion over him, the manifestations of Sergeant Blick's possession had been as stiff and rough, and in nowise redolent of sentiment or of poetry. Nor had he ever observed any amorous tendencies in his former captain and colonel. He, on the contrary, had seemed to shun all such opportunities of dalliance as the fortune of war threw in his way, to care nothing, in fact, for women kind or unkind, only moderately for the more gratifying enjoyments of wine and meat, and prodigiously, for an officer, for clean muskets and well-sharpened pikes, or for well-groomed horses and bright swords. Sergeant Blick could not account for the change, and did not in his heart approve of it, the more that he could make no manner of guess who the lady was.

So he urged his horse a little more till he came alongside the groom, whom he saluted civilly enough and asked plumply who his mistress was, to which the groom replied with equal civility that she was the Countess Ottilie von Thüringen.

"Gott in Himmel!" said Sergeant Blick, and plied no more questions.

He remembered well the Countess Otilie in the early episodes, and wondered the more. Then he gave up wondering, and remembered that he had not drunk for over two hours, an unprecedented thing for him, when not actually engaged on the stern duties of his vocation. Besides, the effort of thinking could only be borne by the aid of liquor.

"She was mixed up with those . . . Lutherans! So she was!" said Blick to himself.

Blick's thirst found relief in time, for Nigel halted at the first convenient inn which promised passable entertainment in the town of Straubing, eight and a half leagues from the city of Ratisbon. He knew that no hostelry on the road to Znaim could in the nature of things produce a meal fit to set before this rare daughter of the Habsburgs. For her nothing could be too kingly, but as the best that could be got was coarse, he had perforce to trust to her love and a traveller's appetite.

They did well to find a hostelry which had another room than that used by the common wayfarers. Nigel bade Blick give his men and the groom a good meal, feed and water the horses sparingly, and have all ready in an hour.

Then they spoke of their immediate plans.

Having encountered no obstacles hitherto, they decided to push on and gain the furthest town they could before the hour of shutting gates. The Archduchess would lodge in the convent. The town they thought to reach was Passau, which possessed two convents as well as a number of churches of old name and fame, in one of which they had it in mind on the morrow to hear the priest pronounce over them the words "*conjungo vos*," by which they should become one till death.

"You are firm of purpose, Stephanie? There is still time to go back!" said Nigel solemnly, looking into her eyes.

"I am plighted, Nigel!" she replied with an equal seriousness. "Let us go on!"

They rose up from the table and went out, mounted and rode on to Plattling. And this time Nigel bade Blick and the troopers ride in front so that they might bring back word if any hindrance barred the road. For Nigel had noticed, and so had Blick, that the roads were patrolled by parties of the Elector's own bodyguard of horse, a circumstance which would have had no significance if they had been upon the road between Ratisbon and Ingolstadt, from which the Swedish troops might at any time arrive. Still, beyond a salute the Bavarian troopers gave no sign. The two rode on.

But as they neared Plattling and the bridge across the Isar by which they would reach the road to Passau, Sergeant Blick came back in haste and warned them that the passing of the bridge was forbidden by a strong party of cavalry in charge of an officer.

Nigel spurred his horse forward, and the Archduchess did the like. They were soon at the bridge.

The officer was unknown to Nigel, but they saluted with great ceremony. The officer saluted with still greater ceremony the Archduchess.

"My escort, captain, tells me you are unable to let us pass the bridge!" said Nigel.

"My instructions are that in sum!" said the officer.

"It would give us pleasure to hear them," said the Archduchess.

"As regards your Imperial Highness," said the officer, "my instructions were that, should you at any time desire to cross, I was to take care that you had an escort of at least fifty men and two officers. I can furnish them at once."

"And General Charteris?"

"His case comes under the second section. No officer

or man of the Imperial army may cross the bridge except by the written order of the Elector, or unless he be carrying despatches to Vienna."

"For what reason is the second order?"

"To prevent desertions from the Elector and the Emperor's troops here to join Wallenstein's!"

"The Elector is very solicitous for our safety and your loyalty, General Charteris. It seems that we must need curtail our pleasurable excursion and return."

The officer looked confused. He had no wish to cross the whim of an Archduchess, but to disobey the Elector was worse. He bowed and made numerous apologies.

Force it was impossible to use. The bridge at Bogen, which was a mile or two to the eastward of Straubing, would be equally guarded. Reluctantly, but without appearance of reluctance, they turned their horses and went back. To Nigel it appeared to be pure mischance.

"No! Where the Jesuits are, dear Nigel, all is forethoughted. Our secret is known or guessed. This was the Elector's prevision!"

"Then we must hasten back before the gates close!" said Nigel, perturbed to the depths. "You must be able to say that you had ridden further in admiration of this beautiful country than you intended, and accepted my escort, not wishing to be incommoded by a train of attendants."

The Archduchess was full of foreboding.

"If we are only back in time my excuse will at all events bear an appearance of probability. But what are we to do next? You are not yet strong enough to take the field. Yet you may depend upon the Elector finding you some pressing duty out of Ratisbon, and he may urge that you were strong enough to ride with me."

"I must obey!" said Nigel. "But I could not leave you without putting our marriage beyond question. Once

Holy Church pronounces the blessed words 'conjungo vos,' Stephanie, nor Emperors nor Electors can dissolve the union."

"It shall be, Nigel! It shall be before midnight to-morrow. Leave the plan, the place, the time to me. I have learned some of the secret ways of Ratisbon. And if you be ordered to-morrow on some futile quest, you must use delay. Oh! dearest! I cannot help but fear, though I shall be cool in plan and firm in execution."

"Courage!" said Nigel stoutly. Though he felt something creeping over him which seemed to give his very voice the lie.

Presently as they interchanged some further words his voice sounded so hollow and feeble that her woman's ear caught the change.

"Nigel! What is it, Nigel?"

"I feel a faintness!" he said. "It will pass!"

"Thank the saints we are near Straubing! Let us walk our horses. It may be we can get wine and supper, and a posting carriage. Her accents betrayed the deep concern, the measureless pity the woman felt for the man she had chosen. Could they be those of the proud Archduchess? Even faintly as they reached his ears they brought the thought to his mind, and filled his soul with a strange ecstasy of strength, carrying on the action of his will, when will seemed to have no more to say.

They reached the Black Eagle of Straubing. Brandy and hot soup was served, and, once alone with him, the Archduchess stripped off his cloak, his tunic, and with a table-knife ripped open his shirt from his wounded shoulder, as she feared the wound had reopened with the toil of riding. Blick was sent for an apothecary, salve and bandages. Fortunately the man of drugs was to be found, and the wound washed and salved and bound up

anew. The Archduchess paid him with a golden crown, bade him hold his peace for ever, and dismissed him.

Then Blick found post-horses and a carriage, and they set forth once more. Yet there was time, if the coachman and postboys did their best, and the promise of gold was tempting.

As the carriage bounded and rumbled along the starlit road, Stephanie took her lover's head upon her soft shoulder, putting her arm about him and drawing him to her as a mother does her child, and kissed him softly, tenderly, as a mother does, and Nigel fell into a deep, peaceful slumber, his last murmur being her name—"Stephanie."

Very peacefully he slept, despite the rumbling and swaying of the carriage, and the Archduchess, satisfied that his breathing was natural, gave herself up to the maturing of her plan, listening now and then to the clattering of the hoofs of their attendants' horses upon the hard road not far behind. At the rate they had travelled she decided that there was yet time to spare. She feared the Elector not at all, her brother Ferdinand about as much, as far as her own self was concerned. But she feared immeasurably for Nigel. The thought that she must be parted from him almost inevitably, directly they had pledged their mutual marriage vows, crushed her with a leaden weight.

They stopped somewhere. She could not guess. The horses were steaming with their exertions. Men threw cloths over them while they rested in their traces. Then they resumed the journey, and presently Nigel awoke, ashamed that he had slept, but with strength of mind and body renewed.

They reached a little village called Obertraubling, two leagues short of Ratisbon.

The carriage stopped. Nigel sprang out. It was of

no use, the postboy said. One horse had gone lame. He could kill the horse by thrashing him, but to get to Ratisbon with the carriage was impossible in the time. He had done his best. Neither Blick nor his troopers nor his groom had come up. Nigel went from one poor house and inn to another in search of one or two fresh horses. Not a horse was to be found.

"No one had a horse if not Farmer Grabstein, the last house in the village."

Postboy and coachman led the stumbling horses along to the house of Farmer Grabstein. No one was about. Nigel knocked at the door and it yielded. There was a fire upon the hearth. There was food of a rough sort upon the table. There were even candles hanging from a beam. He lit one at the embers and stuck it in a candlestick. Then he went back to the carriage and bade Stephanie alight.

She came into the farmhouse and sat down on a bench in the fireplace to warm herself while Nigel made a search. Downstairs there was no one. Upstairs (it was a rough wooden stair, steep as a ladder) were garrets under the thatch. Rolled up in undistinguishable bundles appeared to be some human beings. The air was fetid with their breath and their personal exhalations. Was it worth while to wake them? At all events the Archduchess could not go up that stair.

Then he bade the men put their horses in the stable and sleep there beside them. It would at least be warm.

"Stephanie! My beloved! There is no help for it but wait here till Blick comes up. Then he must get into Ratisbon and bring out horses by hook or by crook! The night is yet young. Our plans have gone dismally awry. Yet I would not have it different if it were not for the tongue of rumour that will even now be busy in Ratisbon!"

She knew well what he meant. The honour of the Emperor's daughter would be besmirched, despite anything that might be said or done or attested: and were it but one day's stain, that stain should not lie between her and the husband she had chosen.

"Show me the place!" she said with a touch of her old hauteur. Nigel took the candle and preceded her. There was yet another room on this floor, an apartment hung with leather, and having a good chest or two of carved work, an oaken table and some chairs: the farmer's state-room, doubtless used on high occasions.

"Here will I abide! Go you, Tall Captain, and fetch me some old dame from the village, so she be clean and not smelling of the cow-byre more than ordinary, and bid her bring a blanket or two."

Nigel went off into the dark again. But she without loss of a moment examined the room and found a door which led into an outermost room, where guns, boots, powder-flasks, and other utensils of the chase hung, and beyond was a great door bolted and barred. This she undid, though it taxed her strength, and found that it opened on to the stable-yard. That she crossed and entered the stable, roused one of the men and bade him rub down the soundest of the horses, feed and water it, and then strap on a saddle she had found in the gun-room, in one hour's time. He would be awakened if necessary. She would ride to Ratisbon. Neither his mate nor any one else was to know. The present of a gold crown made him promise mountains and marvels. She returned to their kitchen and awaited Nigel by the fire.

CHAPTER XLI.

A LATE ARRIVAL AT NICHOLAS KRAFT'S.

IN one of the old burgher palaces of Ratisbon, then the dwelling of Nicholas Kraft, whose guest he was, the Elector Maximilian held a reception after supper each evening in the manner of the French monarch. At these the ladies and gentlemen of his own household, Ferdinand the Archduke and his sister the Archduchess, with their suite, were expected to attend, together with some of the great burghers and their wives, who, whether they possessed patents of nobility or not, were in point of wealth and culture noble, and had the right of entry. The ruling classes of the great free cities had long been accustomed to exchange courtesies on something like equal terms with the princes and nobles who happened to be within their gates, but not to exhibit any undue servility in their regard. Maximilian fully understood this. In Munich, his capital city, there would be differences, but Ratisbon was Ratisbon. Ferdinand the Archduke held himself much aloof. As the son of the Emperor, and possibly his successor, if the Electors should again choose a Habsburg, he possessed much of the Habsburg pride of demeanour and tendency to self-isolation.

The guests had not all assembled. Maximilian himself, though talking affably with the principal burghers, the

few officers present, or some of the ladies, looked gloomy. Indeed he had much to occupy his mind. The latest advices from Ingolstadt told that the fortress town still held out stoutly, and was still closely beset by Gustavus. Of movement towards Ratisbon there were rumours enough, but Maximilian was being well served with information, and these rumours did not trouble him so much as they did the burghers. As in all the great free cities, there was a party favouring Gustavus, another favouring the Emperor, a third whose one desire was to maintain an exact neutrality. All wished the war was at an end, because it interfered wofully with trade.

"I had thought to have seen the Archduchess here to-night!" said Maximilian to the brother of the absent lady.

"In truth," said Ferdinand, "I cannot tell. She is accustomed to follow her whims. I learned that she went out riding to-day. It may be that she is late in returning, and is even now at supper."

Maximilian smiled sombrely and made some polite and meaningless reply, but his manner suggested that he was not at his ease.

"At what hour, Burgomaster, do you close the city gates?" Maximilian asked of his next fellow-guest.

"At eight, your Highness!"

"And the keys?"

"Are brought to my house, your Highness!"

"Ah! Very salutary! You have all things well-ordered in Ratisbon."

"Your Highness is good enough to commend us. Nevertheless, there are many things that may well be improved."

An hour slipped by. Some of the party played *truc*, some *scat*. In a corner some musicians discoursed on viols and lutes and a clavier. The Archduke grew

impatient and sent a page to the lodging of the Archduchess, bidding her attendance. An answer came back that she was indisposed, but that, if the Elector wished to see her particularly, she would endeavour to throw off her migraine and come.

The Archduke sent a still more peremptory message. Maximilian looked still more sombre.

This time he stopped to speak to an officer who had just come in. They stood apart.

"The gates are shut?" was Maximilian's inquiry.

"Yes, your Highness!"

"Has the Archduchess in fact returned?"

"No, your Highness!"

"Have you had any message?"

"Her coach broke down at Obertraubling, three leagues from Ratisbon! She is spending the night at a farmhouse!"

"Alone?" There was a perceptible quiver in his voice.

"The Scottish officer, General Charteris, is with her!"

"Ah! He has recovered from his wounds?"

"I should have thought not! I have been doing my best, your Highness. Two days ago he was too weak to mount a horse. But the eyes of an Archduchess, your Highness, are a very potent salve!"

Again the Elector frowned.

"Can you make anything of this escapade?"

The Jesuit returned the look in the Elector's eyes. Each seemed to search the other's.

"Whatever it was meant to be it has been frustrated, and your Highness will find her submissive enough to-morrow."

"But if she has given herself . . ."

"Your Highness need not fear. She has but walked into one mouse-trap and the Scot into another."

Maximilian simply grumbled a dissatisfied "H'm!"

His knowledge of the Jesuits and their deep schemes was tempered by an insatiable jealousy where the Archduchess was concerned, and a knowledge of the wiles of women, which he deemed must be superior to that of any Jesuit but one, that one being Father Lamormain.

"It is time to apprise the Archduke Ferdinand that he is being fooled by her women." Then he left the Jesuit abruptly and crossed over to Ferdinand.

"Our dear Stephanie will not, I fear, be here to-night!"

"Why not, cousin?" was Ferdinand's somewhat petulant query. He was not at all gratified at having come to Ratisbon, only to find that Maximilian was once again defeated. He would almost have preferred him to have taken up the position of the neutral. He was angry with the Archduchess for her persistent opposition to his father's wish for the match with Maximilian: annoyed with Maximilian for his continual fidgeting about her absence, to which Ferdinand attached no importance.

"Because she is not in Ratisbon!"

"But I have had messages from her!"

"From her women, who are doubtless in league to deceive you!"

Ferdinand looked much that he did not utter.

He looked at the clock that stood in one corner of the apartment.

"Ten o'clock, and not returned. You must lend me a troop of your hussars to scour the roads!"

"With pleasure! But I beg that you will use discretion. The name of a princess that will one day be Electress of Bavaria may not be lightly bandied. May I suggest Captain von Grätz?"

"As you will, cousin!"

They had just signed to the Jesuit when the door opened, and the servants announced—

"Her Imperial Highness, the Archduchess Stephanie!"

The faces of the three men turned towards the door in amazement and expectation.

It was the Archduchess. She came clad in amber silk, heavy with the richest embroidered work of raised flowers, a high stiff collar, her round neck and swelling bosom bare, save for the velvet of darker hue than the stuff which framed them, and a necklace of rare pearls. Her train was upheld by two of the fairest dames of her company, and these and two others and two pages were all attired as richly, yet served as a foil nevertheless to her supreme dark beauty. In her eyes was the lurking light of laughter, though her lip had more than usual of its proud upward curl. Her eyes danced as with her quick gaze they lit upon the three astounded faces of her suitor, her brother, and the officer they called von Grätz.

Nicholas Kraft and his wife hastened forward and bent the knee before her. To them all graciousness she said—

"It is to seem an unwilling guest to arrive at your hospitable house so late, but you must please excuse me for the chapter of accidents that has done nothing but beset me this day."

The Elector strode forward, his eyes roving over her as if they would devour her, for he ever found fresh enchantment and delight in her beauty, fain though he was not to betray himself too much.

The Archduke followed, but not too eagerly. Captain von Grätz alone remained where he was, prey to a hundred vexations, but showing nothing in his calm face.

"So eager yet, cousin Maximilian!"

"Say rather anxious, dear Stephanie! I have done my best to have the roads patrolled, but I fear your horse or your escort must have been indifferent that you have been so delayed."

"I am afraid it was my own fault, cousin, that I went too far and forgot that my Scottish gentleman equerry for the day was but lately wounded in your service and could ill bear the saddle. As it is, I have left him behind me, and I fear that he will be but a fit subject for his bed for some days to come! How triumphantly your music sounds!"

"It should ring twice as bravely from thrice as many trumpets as we have viols, would you but give me leave, Stephanie, and bid me don a bridal suit. You are vastly goddess-like to-night?"

"Because I am happy, despite the war that makes you all so gloomy!"

"If I could think your happiness was in being here in Ratisbon with me, then should not war last a week. I would even make terms and bid Gustavus to our nuptials."

"And sacrifice the future of Wallenstein?" she asked with a pretty malice.

"Why? What of Wallenstein?"

"Wallenstein's army grows greater every day!"

"'Tis well! We could make the better bargain with Gustavus."

"And the Emperor?"

"Would console himself for the loss of glory in finding a son-in-law who would adventure the care of his rebellious Stephanie."

The Elector's brow had cleared. He was enraptured to find her in so winning a mood that he proposed a pavane. And in a few minutes dancing was the order of the evening.

The Jesuit watched and noticed how the Elector surrendered to his passion, confident at last that he had virtually won the hand of the princess. At last he left the court circle alone and quietly, and went to the lodging

he shared with Nigel. There another surprise awaited him, for Nigel lay asleep in his bed. The Jesuit examined the bandages, saw that they had been freshly put on, and that tied in the final knot was a single long black hair.

CHAPTER XLII.

IN THE ABBEY CHURCH.

It was as the clock at the cathedral boomed out eight on the next night but one that the old abbey church of St Jacob, which by some is called the Scots church, by reason that the Benedictines to whom it once belonged were mostly of Scottish or Irish parentage, was dimly lit as to a chapel on the left side of the choir.

Nigel groped his way up the nave towards it. Another shadow crept out of the darkness of a side door on the northern side, and as it came into the dim circle of light from the single swinging lamp depending from the arch of the chapel, Nigel made out that it was a woman, and that woman the Archduchess Stephanie.

They exchanged a whispered greeting and knelt down together upon the cushion prepared for them upon the threshold of the chapel. Two men entered by the door of the nave, cloaked, booted, and spurred, as was Nigel, and strode with firm steps up towards the same chapel, and halting sat down upon the nearest seat. They had doffed their hats as they entered, hats with long plumes, and the cloaks did not altogether conceal the steel gorgets which they wore, for the light, dim though it was, caught them. Their stern war-worn faces looked steadily towards the chapel.

From the small door beside the chapel came a priest and his acolyte, a choir boy.

Rapidly the priest read through a short homily in an accent, though the words were German, which betrayed an original acquaintance with the country from which Nigel sprang.

Then he proceeded with more deliberation to recite the marriage service and to ask the questions and to prompt the replies which are therein set forth.

Low and prompt and firm came the answers from Nigel. Low and musical, though not without some tremor in her utterance, came the responses from the Archduchess Stephanie.

Then came the moment of intense solemnity when the priest placed the ring upon her finger with the words, "Conjuncto vos," and an irrepressible sigh came from her, the sigh of relief after a suspense not so long as profound. Still they knelt, and the priest began to celebrate the sacrament of the Mass preparatory to giving the two souls before him the blessing of Holy Church.

The two knelt oblivious to everything but the presence of one another, and their ears strained not to lose any of the precious words which fell from the priest's lips—words long familiar, sanctified in themselves, sanctified further by long usage, thrice holy in being uttered on this most solemn occasion in their lives.

But while they knelt a procession of shadows seemed to the two onlookers to come into the church, stealthily and slowly, and the two looking round as stealthily, saw that a portion of the nave, and of the side aisles, was being filled. Very quietly one of the two men departed by the door by which the Archduchess had come. He was there one instant, the next he had melted into the shadow.

The mass went on. The acolyte did his office. The priest his. Not a falter came into his voice. He seemed

even more absorbed in his office than his two kneeling listeners.

Scarcely had he pronounced his final benediction, to which the now solitary onlooker added a deep-toned "Amen," than all four, Nigel and his Archduchess just risen from their knees, the solitary onlooker, and the priest, were startled by the sound of a trumpet, and in a trice the church seemed to be filled with lighted torches.

The light fell upon a noble assemblage, which moved forward to the open space before the choir.

In the forefront were the Elector Maximilian and the Archduke Ferdinand. Behind them came the principal officers of their suite and of the garrison.

Upon the faces of the Elector and of the Archduke sat stern determination. Upon the others, more or less attuned to those of their masters, sat a natural wonder, and on some something of dismay. They had been bidden. They had come. They could only wonder what reason could bring the Elector and his guest to the St Jacob's church at such a time.

Round about stood a guard of perhaps fifty men of the Elector's bodyguard, bearing torches and arms.

As the facts gradually displaced the first natural burst of astonishment in the mind of Nigel and the Archduchess, they drew involuntarily closer together, and the priest preceding them with the paten still in his hand they approached the Elector.

The priest said in a loud clear voice—

"Be it known to your Highnesses and all men and all women that the Archduchess Stephanie has this day espoused Nigel Charteris of Pencaitland and has become his wife. They are now man and wife according to the ordinance and the blessing of Holy Church. Let no man seek to separate them on pain of the loss of his eternal salvation. Amen."

"Good Father," said the Elector, "you have now done your office. We also, as representing the Emperor, the faithful son of the Church, do pronounce that, insomuch as the Archduchess has taken upon herself to marry in direct disobedience to her father's wishes, she is hereby cast out from his family, and from all the rights and privileges of her birth, and henceforth will enjoy neither princely rank nor any fortune except such as she may still hold according to the law as a private person."

"And now," said the Archduke Ferdinand, "insomuch as General Nigel Charteris, being a trusted officer of the Emperor, has endeavoured to desert, carrying with him the daughter of the Emperor and our sister, in which he has committed two heinous crimes against the Emperor's majesty, he will be immediately arrested and tried by a court-martial for the first crime, and by ourselves for the second. Of the issue there can be no doubt."

"I deny, your Highness," said Nigel in a loud firm voice, "that I ever had the intention of deserting the Emperor's service. Nor have your Highnesses any evidence of such intention. My services are a complete answer to the charge."

"As to marrying the Archduchess Stephanie, I am a Scottish gentleman whose forebears are of as old and gentle a race as your own. I admit the right of no man, be he called Elector or Emperor, to say me nay."

"Arrest him!" said the Archduke.

"You must reach him through my body!" said the Archduchess, throwing herself in front of Nigel.

"You had best bid your lover good-bye, and waste no words!" said the Elector grimly, and motioned the captain of the guard to come forward.

"Halt!" rang out a grim harsh voice, which resounded strangely through the domes and hollows of the church.

And the solitary onlooker of the two, who had witnessed

the marriage, strode into the ring of light, fronting the Elector.

"I am Sir John Hepburn of the Scots Brigade, serving Gustavus of Sweden!"

The Elector scanned his lineaments. The Archduke had never seen this renowned leader in the field as the Elector had, and was inclined to doubt.

"You are a bold knight to place yourself in the hands of your enemies like this!" said the Elector. "The age of chivalry is past, if it ever was! What have you to say?"

"But this, your Highness! I crave nothing. The lands of Charteris and the lands of Hepburn in broad Scotland march together. We fight on different sides, but we do not forget for all that and all that, that we are brother Scots the world o'er. I came here to witness the wedding of Nigel Charteris to Stephanie of Habsburg. I have seen it and shall return to Gustavus."

"We shall not hinder you, Sir John Hepburn," said the Elector. "The men of your nation have strange customs, and it may be this is one of them to penetrate into the enemy's camp to carry out a domestic rite. You are free to go as you have come!"

"Free to go!" The voice rang out like a gusty clarion. "Look around you! It is for us to do as we will. You are all prisoners, every one of you."

Involuntarily Elector, Archduke, officers, gentlemen, and ladies turned their heads apprehensively.

Out of the semi-darkness beyond the ring of the torches gleamed rough-bearded faces and the glint of a hundred claymores. Nay there were two hundred, three hundred. The effect of the darkness was doubtless to add a mystery to what they saw.

An officer sprang towards the door to raise the alarm. It was useless. The hilt of a sword knocked him senseless upon the stones.

"Do you see my warrant? Aye! I know well you do. What I undertake I carry out. Here and now deliver Nigel Charteris his safe-conduct to join Wallenstein, and I wager he will yet do the Emperor more service than he has yet done, though I would fain he was upon our side instead of against us. Come, your Highness! To the sacristy and sign the priest's book and a safe-conduct. Swallow your arrests and your court-martial! As for the Archduchess, she will after her man or she is no true woman."

The Elector and the Archduke exchanged looks. Their guard was hopelessly outnumbered, and it was clear that Sir John Hepburn held them in the hollow of his hand.

"If the Scots are like you, Sir John Hepburn!" said the Archduchess, holding out her hand, which the Scots leader bowed over and kissed in courtly fashion, "I am glad to marry a Scot. Next to my husband shall I rank you as the first of my friends."

"Aye, madame, and yonder Sir Archibald Ruthven as the second, for he it was who brought up our little army. Now let us sign!"

He motioned to the Elector and the Archduke.

The priest led the way to the sacristy, and there, willy-nilly, Maximilian of Bavaria and the Archduke Ferdinand wrote their names as present at the marriage of Nigel Charteris and the Archduchess Stephanie of Habsburg, and then, to Sir John's dictation, inscribed on parchment a full safe-conduct which, if words could do it, granted safety to the newly-wedded pair from all reprisals or attacks from Imperial troops or officers, so long as Nigel Charteris remained in the Emperor's service, and permitted his safe departure from Germany whensoever that service should end.

Then at the doors of the church, when they were at length thrown open, were found a coach and four horses,

and an escort of horse, at the head of which was the doughty Sergeant Blick, waiting to conduct their beloved colonel upon the first stage of his journey.

With hearty hand-clasping and good wishes the colonel and his bride mounted the coach and set out.

Then Sir John Hepburn courteously saluted the Elector and the Archduke, and putting himself at the head of his men marched them to the western gate at Ratisbon, lit by the torches of their foes, and set out upon his ride back to Ingolstadt. Thus ended a hitherto unrecorded episode in the Thirty Years' War, and a most momentous chapter in the history of Nigel Charteris of Pencaitland and his rebel Habsburger.

THE END.

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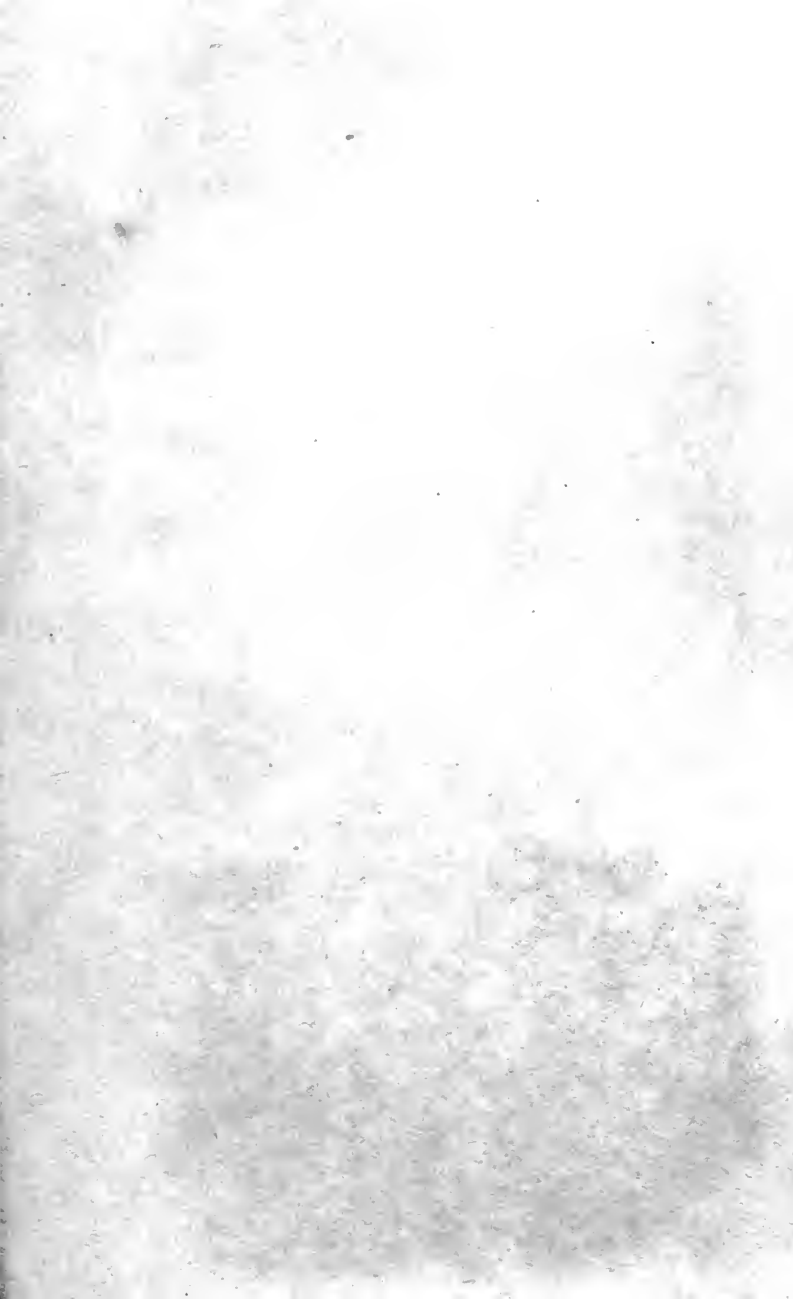
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